



## Southwest Chapter

Newsletter of AMWA Southwest Chapter

January 2006

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## Annual John P. McGovern Award Banquet Recognizing Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH

**Date:** January 19, 2006 (Thursday)

**Time:** 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.

**Place:** The Houstonian Hotel  
111 North Post Oak Lane  
Houston, Texas

The AMWA Southwest Chapter is pleased to present the 2006 John P. McGovern Award to Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH. Dr. Gastel coordinates the master's degree program in science and technology journalism at Texas A&M University, where she teaches medical writing and related subjects in her capacity as an associate professor of veterinary integrative biosciences, humanities in medicine, and biotechnology. Dr. Gastel is also the editor of the Council of Science Editors publication *Science Editor*, and she has published four books on medical writing, science education, and related subjects.

Dr. Gastel regularly teaches the AMWA Advanced Curriculum course *Teaching Techniques: Theory and Practice* and two Core Curriculum courses, *Medical Journalism: From Choosing a Topic Through Polishing the Piece* and *Journal Submissions Other Than Research Articles*. She was made an AMWA Fellow in 1991 for her many contributions to the organization. Additionally, Dr. Gastel received AMWA's Golden Apple Award in 1993 for her consistent excellence as a workshop leader, and she was honored with the Harold Swanberg Distinguished Service Award in 1998 for her extensive contributions to the field of medical writing.

In addition to her educational contributions in the United States, Dr. Gastel has done a great deal to promote medical writing abroad. She spent two years as visiting professor of technical communication at Beijing Medical University, and she directs part of a program funded by the China Medical Board of New York to help Asian researchers publish their work in English-language international journals. She also led delegations of medical writers to China and Mongolia in 1995 and to Russia and Estonia in 1997 as part of the People to People Citizen Ambassador Program.

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Please join us for the annual John P. McGovern Award Banquet at the Houstonian Hotel to honor Dr. Gastel, who will give a lecture entitled, "Educating Medical Writers and Editors: Adventures on Two Continents." The banquet will begin with a reception at 6:30 p.m., at which hors d'oeuvres will be served and a cash bar will be available. Dinner will begin at 7:15 p.m. and will consist of a salad of mixed sweet lettuce with oven-dried strawberries, apples, feta cheese, and toasted walnuts, followed by a choice of entrée: pecan-crusted chicken with bourbon glaze or grilled vegetable lasagna. The lecture will begin at about 8:00 p.m. while attendees enjoy chocolate toffee crunch torte or cinnamon apple tart in a puff pastry shell with coffee or tea.

The registration fee for the banquet is \$30 for members and \$35 for nonmembers. A dessert-and-coffee option is available for those who are unable to attend the dinner but would like to arrive later to attend only the lecture at 8:00 p.m. The cost for dessert and coffee only is \$8 for members and \$10 for nonmembers.

RSVP for the banquet by Monday, January 16, by sending your check (payable to AMWA Southwest) to Steve Palmer at 6615 Meadowlawn Street, Houston, TX 77023, or RSVP by e-mail to

[spalmer@heart.thi.tmc.edu](mailto:spalmer@heart.thi.tmc.edu). If you register via e-mail, please be prepared to pay at the door on the evening of the event. When you register, please include the following information:

- Your name
- Your e-mail address (or, if you don't use e-mail, your daytime telephone number)
- Whether or not you are an AMWA member
- Whether you are coming for dinner or just for dessert
- Your choice of entrée (if you are coming for the dinner):
  - ◆ Pecan-crusted chicken
  - ◆ Grilled vegetable lasagna
- Your choice of dessert:
  - ◆ Chocolate toffee crunch torte
  - ◆ Cinnamon apple tart in a puff pastry shell

The Houstonian Hotel, Club and Spa (1.800.231.2759) is located at 111 North Post Oak Lane in Houston, Texas, just off I-610 opposite Memorial Park and north of Woodway Drive. (Detailed directions will be sent to all registrants before the banquet date.) Parking in the hotel garage is free of charge.

For more information, contact Steve Palmer at 832.355.8902 or [spalmer@heart.thi.tmc.edu](mailto:spalmer@heart.thi.tmc.edu).

## **“Communicating with the Homeless”**

**Presented by David S. Buck, MD, MPH**  
**at the Annual Holiday Gala**

At the annual AMWA Southwest Holiday Gala on December 5, David S. Buck, MD, MPH gave a compelling presentation on his work with Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston (HHH) to the 26 members present. HHH is a consortium of health care and community-based service organizations

(<http://www.homeless-healthcare.org>) that aims to provide accessible and comprehensive health care to Houston's homeless people and help them become self-sufficient. Dr. Buck, an associate professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, is the

president and chief medical officer of HHH. For his work with HHH, Dr. Buck received the Association of American Medical Colleges Humanism in Medicine Award in 2000 and was again selected as a distinguished finalist for the award in 2003.

Dr. Buck illustrated how widespread homelessness is with numbers. In the United States, about 760,000 people are homeless every night and 12 million people will experience temporary homelessness. Houston has approximately 14,000 homeless people at any time, and each year, about 34,000 people in Houston experience temporary homelessness.

Illness often contributes to a person's homelessness that, in turn, has a big impact on health. Many homeless adults (33-50%) have illnesses of some kind, commonly severe mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse, diabetes, and hypertension. Homeless people often seek medical care at hospital emergency rooms, the least effective and most costly option for them. Moreover, best practice standards effective for the general population may not always meet the needs of ill homeless people. Thus, in Dr. Buck's opinion, communicating with the homeless about their health care is the best approach.

Dr. Buck experienced this firsthand during his first years of taking care of the homeless. Dr. Buck said, "Being a doctor, I wanted to treat the homeless for their illnesses. But I found out, for example, that expecting a homeless patient to keep his afternoon doctor's appointment is unrealistic because he has to report to the homeless shelter in the same afternoon to secure a bed for the night. And more than any disease, staying on the street overnight presents a far graver danger to homeless people."

Instead of treating illness, Dr. Buck and other HHH clinicians started to focus on establishing trusting relationships with homeless people via medical outreach on the street and at shelters. They found that homeless people will eventually approach them to address their illnesses, at which point the patient and health care providers can begin developing a treatment plan that is solution-oriented and promotes the homeless patient's self-sufficiency.

Dr. Buck told about his year-long efforts to gain a homeless man's trust. He began by bringing the man lunch, leaving it at the other side of the street initially. Dr. Buck then placed the lunch closer and closer to the man and eventually started talking to him. The man took the initiative in asking about treatment, and Dr. Buck ensured direct patient care by taking him as his own patient rather than referring him to another clinician at one of the HHH's three clinics.

HHH does not limit its communications with homeless people to discussing treatment plans. Homeless, formerly homeless ombudsmen, and the HHH Advisory Council identified the need for a bus system to transport homeless people in Harris County to medical and social services. Since then, the bus has served tens of thousands of individuals. In addition, homeless people on the street have also helped improve the HHH research program by suggesting health care issues that warrant study.

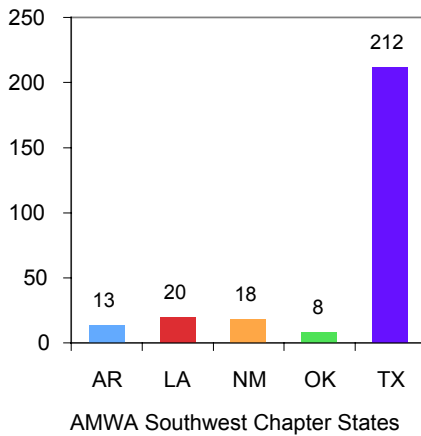
Dr. Buck concluded his presentation by commenting on HHH's entry into the digital age of medical record keeping. Previously, patients were often treated for emergent health problems while other health problems were not monitored. In 2000, HHH decided to take advantage of available technologies such as personal digital assistants (PDAs) to link all three of its clinics electronically, but the power of these PDAs was inadequate for keeping medical records of too many homeless patients in its street outreach program. Currently, more powerful tablet PCs with electronic writing capabilities are being used to share patient records and coordinate care among the various participating healthcare providers.

Dr. Buck's presentation followed a dinner at Josephine's Ristorante in downtown Houston. Before introducing Dr. Buck, Program Chair Steve Palmer opened the floor to announcements. These included announcements of openings for a senior scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center and for a senior scientific/medical writer and editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at the Texas Heart Institute, both in Houston.

# 2005 AMWA Southwest Survey: Member Opinions about Chapter Activities

**Steve Palmer, Program Chair, and Anita Frijhoff, Assistant Program Chair  
and Chapter Conference Coordinator**

The AMWA Southwest chapter has 271 members spread over a large geographical area (Figure 1). To find out how to best serve these members, we conducted a survey asking for their opinions about chapter meetings and the chapter conference. Our thanks to all survey respondents, and congratulations to Lacey Mizell for winning a free registration for the Medical Communications Conference, which will be held in Austin, Texas, on May 19, 2006.



**Figure 1.** Geographical distribution of AMWA Southwest members

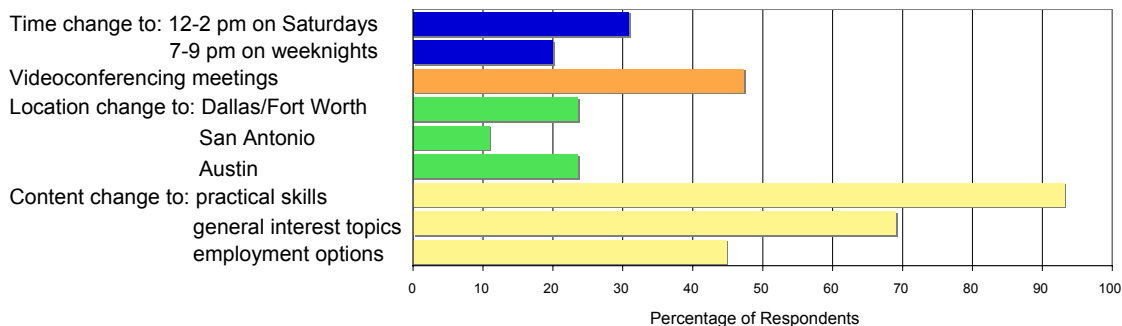
The majority of the respondents (54%) said they never attend chapter meetings, 16% go to one or two meetings a year, 12% attend three or four meetings a year, and 18% attend all or almost all meetings. Several respondents commented that their main reasons for not attending chapter meetings are distance and family commitments. To find out how meeting attendance can be increased, the survey asked respondents if they would attend meetings more frequently if the time, the location, or the content of the meetings were changed.

Members were notified about the survey via the chapter listserv. (If you want to subscribe to this list, send an e-mail to [amwasouthwest-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:amwasouthwest-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).) Of the approximately 215 members subscribing to the listserv, 61 participated, a response rate of 28%.

Forty-seven percent of the respondents said that videoconferencing would increase their meeting attendance (Figure 2). Thirty-one percent said that their meeting attendance would increase if meetings took place on Saturday afternoons instead of weekday evenings. Additionally, 20% of the respondents said they would attend more meetings on weeknights if the meetings began and ended an hour later, i.e., 7–9 p.m. rather than 6–8 p.m.

### Member Opinions about Chapter Meetings

AMWA Southwest chapter meetings are held six times a year in or near Houston, Texas. The July meeting is held on a Saturday from 12–2 p.m.; each of the other meetings occurs on a weekday evening from 6–8 p.m.



**Figure 2.** Changes that could enhance meeting attendance among respondents

Some respondents indicated that a change in the meeting location would increase their attendance: 24% said they would attend meetings in Dallas/Fort Worth or Austin, but only 11% would go to meetings in San Antonio. A number of respondents indicated that they would like to see meetings organized in chapter states other than Texas.

Almost all respondents (93%) said that offering practical workshops that teach skills relevant to medical communicators would make them attend chapter meetings more (Figure 2). Presentations on topics of general interest to medical communicators would be an incentive to attend meetings for 69% of the respondents. Forty-five percent indicated interest in presentations about employment options for medical communicators. Suggestions from respondents for meeting topics included strategic planning, topics related to the pharmaceutical industry, and learning how to approach stories or topics of interest.

### **Implementing Survey Results— Chapter Meetings**

AMWA Southwest chapter meetings take place in Houston because the Greater Houston area is home to the largest concentration of AMWA Southwest members (104/271). But chapter meetings can be held anywhere in chapter states where members are willing to organize them. (For more about meetings outside Houston, see below.)

The survey indicated interest among members to have Houston chapter meetings take place on Saturday afternoons rather than on weeknights. The May roundtable meeting will be held concurrently with a brunch on a Saturday in Houston. The AMWA Southwest board members will discuss whether to have more Saturday meetings.

The majority of the survey respondents would like the meetings to teach skills relevant to medical communicators. At the upcoming chapter meeting in March, Powerpoint skills will be taught. More meetings with practical topics will be planned for the 2006–2007 schedule. Members who would like to present such meetings are invited to contact the Assistant Program Chair ([frijhoff@sbcglobal.net](mailto:frijhoff@sbcglobal.net);

512.323.5171). In response to a respondent's suggestion, the Program Chair and Assistant Program Chair will establish and publish in advance the schedule of upcoming chapter meetings in Houston, so out-of-town members will have more time to plan their attendance.

Several survey respondents who do not live in Texas asked for regional meetings in their states. Serving members outside the Greater Houston area has been a longstanding problem for the Southwest chapter. To address it, the chapter has installed regional directors for Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, as well as North and Central Texas. (For their contact information, see the Officers page on the chapter website.) Further, since 2001, the chapter has committed \$200 annual allotments to each regional director to use at his or her own discretion to fund a regional meeting or to offset the cost of travel to the AMWA Southwest board meeting in March.

Regional meetings have been held in Albuquerque and Dallas, but no ongoing program exists in any of the chapter regions outside the Houston area. In a recent discussion on the chapter listserv, the regional directors of Arkansas, Louisiana, and New Mexico recounted their efforts to set up activities for local members. Their experience was that those efforts were stymied by insufficient interest among local members. Thus, regional meetings need to be suitable for small audiences. Also, to comply with the nonprofit educational status of the Southwest chapter, these meetings need to be educational and open to the public. Tom Gegeny, one of the chapter's Directors-at-Large, suggested several ideas for regional meetings, including viewing a videotaped chapter meeting; a seminar by a local author, reporter, publisher, grant writer, or physician (with the speaker receiving a complimentary dinner rather than an honorarium); or a meet-and-greet at a restaurant, coffee shop, or a member's house (potluck). Hanson Yu, a member from El Paso, suggested getting together with Kristina Anderson, regional director of New Mexico, and other members for a journal club. Setting up programs in the chapter regions is no easy task, and the board will work together with the regional directors to get them the support they need.

Videoconferencing as a way to attend chapter meetings was very popular among the survey respondents. Unfortunately, unless a donor can be found for the equipment, videoconferencing is not financially feasible for the chapter. Some financially feasible methods for meeting without traveling were suggested in the recent chapter listserv discussion: Tom Gegeny suggested arranging online chat sessions through the chapter's Yahoo! Groups account, and Carol Thompson from Lubbock told about her positive experience using web conference services to conduct Internet meetings. In 2002, the chapter partnered with the Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center (HAM-TMC) Library to present a Webcast of the chapter's December lecture. The board will have many technology-based alternatives to mull over at its next meeting.

### Member Opinions about Chapter Conferences

Two AMWA Southwest chapter conferences were organized in the 1980s. After a hiatus it was decided to organize chapter conferences every two years, starting in 2002. So far, chapter conferences have been held in Houston (where The University of

Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center offered free meeting space). Austin members Anita Frijhoff and Pamela McAlpin volunteered to be the coordinators of the 2006 chapter conference in Austin.

Survey respondents were asked about the likelihood that they would attend the 2006 chapter conference and about their preferences for the date of the conference and the particular workshops to be offered. Of the respondents, 12% said they definitely planned to attend the conference, 35% said that they would probably attend, 28% were undecided, 17% said they would probably not attend; and 9% said they would definitely not attend.

Most respondents (52%) had no preference for either of the two weeks during which the conference venue, St. Edward's University, is available, but May 15–19 was slightly more popular (28%) than May 22–26 (21%). With regard to the day of the week, the majority of the respondents either preferred Friday or had no preference (38% each). Of the remaining respondents, 26% preferred Monday, and 15% or fewer preferred each of the remaining weekdays.

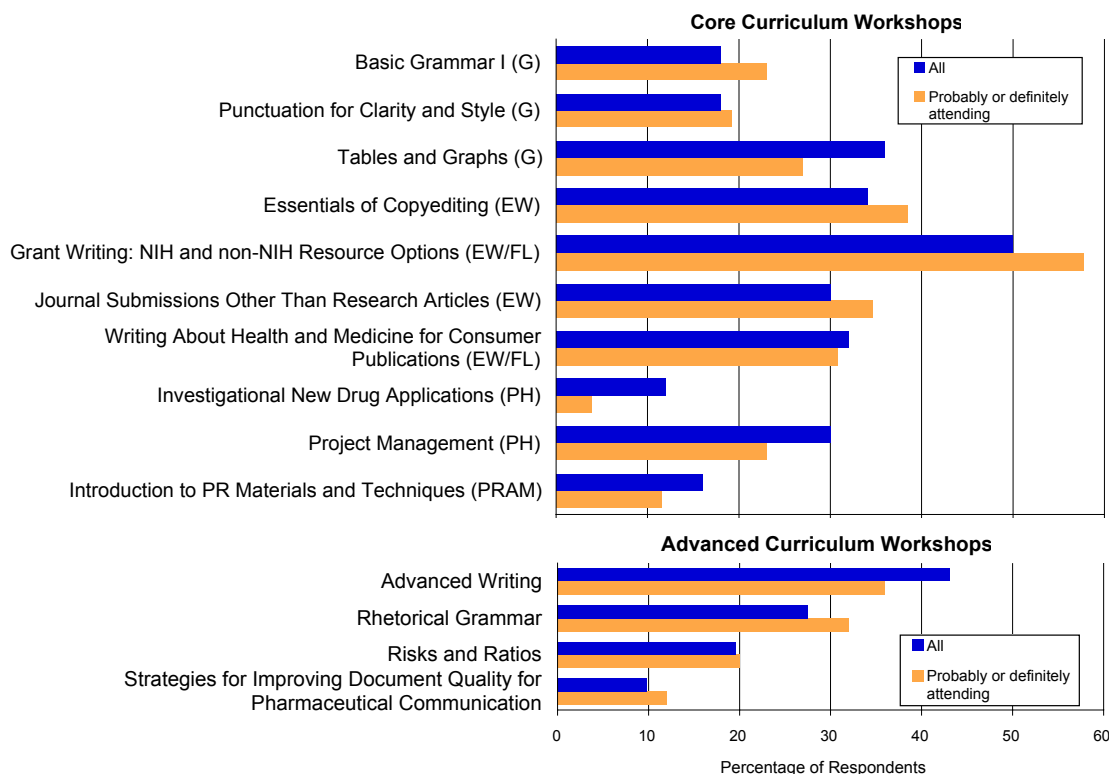


Figure 3. Respondents' preferences for proposed curriculum workshops at 2006 chapter conference

*Grant Writing: NIH and Non-NIH Resource Options* (EW/FL) was the most popular core curriculum workshop, both among all respondents (50%) and among those who said they would probably or definitely attend the conference (58%) (Figure 3). In the latter group, the next most popular core curriculum workshops were *Essentials of Copyediting* (EW) (39%) and *Journal Submissions Other Than Research Articles* (EW) (35%).

The most popular advanced curriculum workshop was *Advanced Writing*, both among all respondents (43%) and among those who will probably or definitely attend the conference (36%) (Figure 3).

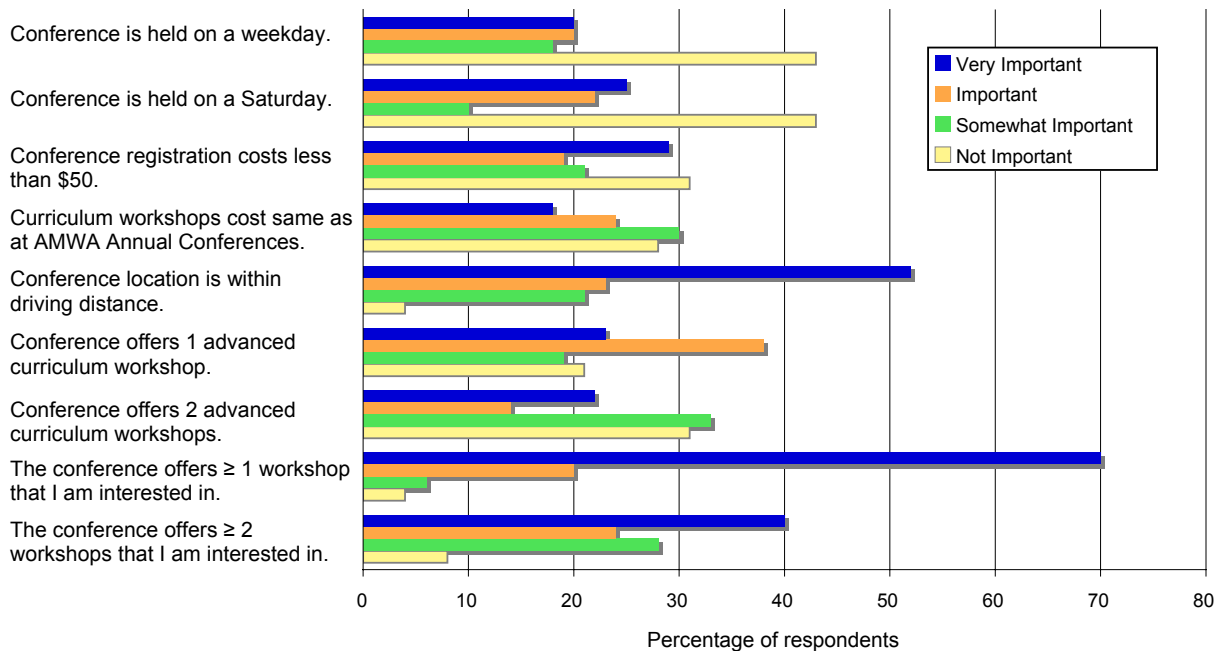
To aid the planning of chapter conferences for 2008 and beyond, survey respondents were queried about the importance of various chapter conference features (Figure 4). Most respondents (70%) considered it very important that the conference offer at least one workshop that they are interested in, and 40% considered it very important that the conference offer at least two such workshops. The majority of the respondents (52%) rated a conference location within driving distance as very important. Many respondents (38%) thought it important that the conference offer one advanced workshop, and 33% considered it to be somewhat

important to have two advanced workshops to choose from. The majority of respondents considered the cost of curriculum workshops to be only somewhat important (30%) or unimportant (28%). Opinions were divided on whether conference registration fees should be \$50 or less, with 31% rating that as unimportant and 29% rating it as very important. The day of the week (Saturday or a weekday) on which the conference is held was considered unimportant by 43% of respondents; those who rated the conference day as very important slightly preferred Saturday (25%) to a weekday (20%).

**Implementing Survey Results—  
2006 Chapter Conference**

Many respondents indicated they had no preference for the date of the 2006 chapter conference. Among those who did have a preference, Friday, May 19, was slightly preferred over other dates and thus was selected by the conference coordinators.

*Grant Writing: NIH and Non-NIH Resource Options* (EW/FL) was very popular among the respondents, making it an easy choice for the slate of workshops to be offered at the upcoming chapter conference. Because the chapter pays the travel and lodging expenses for all workshop instructors, and



**Figure 4.** Respondents' ratings of chapter conference features according to importance

because the instructor of the grant-writing workshop, Joan Nilson, lives out of state, she was invited to also teach her other curriculum workshop, *Bibliographic Resources for Medical Communicators [Editorial Approach]* (G). Ms. Nilson kindly accepted the invitation. Among respondents who will probably or definitely attend the chapter conference, the second and third choices for core curriculum workshops were *Essentials of Copyediting* (EW) and *Journal Submissions Other Than Research Articles* (EW). Dr. Barbara Gastel, the in-state instructor of the latter workshop, kindly accepted an invitation to teach her workshop at the May 2006 conference in Austin.

AMWA headquarters allows chapter conferences to offer a maximum of four workshops. Rounding out the 2006 slate of workshops is *Advanced Writing*, the favorite of the advanced curriculum workshops among the respondents. The in-state instructor, Marianne Mallia, graciously accepted to teach not only *Advanced Writing* but also *Giving Effective Presentations*, an interactive, noncredit workshop on public speaking.

### **Implementing Survey Results— Chapter Conferences after 2006**

Those interested in having a chapter conference in their town may want to take note that respondents rated as very important that future chapter conferences be within driving distance and that at least one workshop of interest be offered. The latter issue may be addressed by an online survey of members conducted several months before each future chapter conference.

Because 79% of AMWA Southwest's members live in Texas, the conference location is within driving

distance for most members if the chapter conferences are planned in any one of the larger Texas cities. Thus, chapter conferences will continue to take place in Texas once every two years.

In alternate years, conferences may be organized in the other chapter states. Those conferences will probably need to be smaller (i.e., offering one or two workshops) to be financially feasible. The location of these regional chapter conferences will depend on the degree of interest that local members have in organizing and attending the conferences. The AMWA Southwest officers, together with the regional directors, will look into the feasibility of such alternative conferences. Of course, if these chapter conferences are paired with a sightseeing event, they may attract members from chapter regions, as well as local members.

### **Summary**

The 61 AMWA Southwest members who participated in the survey indicated a need for the chapter to increase its efforts to reach out to members in all chapter states; many respondents reported feeling isolated from the chapter's activities, which mostly take place in Houston. Survey respondents, as well as participants in a recent listserv discussion, made several suggestions for improving member outreach. The board will discuss these suggestions at its March meeting and is looking forward to working with members in setting up activities in all chapter states.

Finally, the respondents' answers were instrumental in setting the date and the workshop schedule of the upcoming chapter conference in Austin, Texas, on May 19, 2006.

## ***AMWA Southwest Chapter Newsletter***

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