



THE Bulletin

of Tau Beta Pi

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A Publication
for the Collegiate
Chapters

Meet Smarter, Not Harder!

by Michael L. Peterson, Iowa Alpha '89

You may think that ineffective meetings are for the most part somebody else's problem:

- At your summer or co-op jobs, you attend meetings that other people organize, so it's their fault if things don't go right.
- You're a student—you go to classes, not to meetings!

However, let's look at meetings a different way. Your life is probably affected more by meetings than you realize. What do the following events have in common?

- Peace or business negotiations
- Sessions of Congress
- Professional society conferences
- Tau Beta Pi National Conventions
- Reunions of alumni
- Collegiate club gatherings
- Study or senior-project group get-togethers, and
- Dates?

Yes—they're all meetings! By meetings, we're talking about any type of gathering of people to accomplish some purpose. As you look at the above list, you may realize that you spend even more time in meetings than you thought (and you may have already thought you were spending too much time in them!) Therefore, you don't want to be stuck in meetings (or, worse yet, be responsible for meetings) that are not effective and a great use of everyone's time.



this article, we'll take a look at what you can do as a meeting leader and participant to make your meetings even more effective. While many of the ideas here may not strike you as rocket engineering, please challenge yourself to apply what you read here to the meetings that you are part of each week, and work to do things differently as a result—the hard part is not knowing what to do differently, but doing it!

There are a lot of detail issues involved in making meetings work, more than can be covered in a three-page article. Therefore, we'll focus on three high-level attributes of meetings that are critical to success; if these aren't "right," the meeting will have difficulty in being effective, no matter how well the details are planned. Those three items are the meeting's *purpose, participants, and process.*

INSIDE
THIS ISSUE

Meet Smarter, Not Harder	1
Database Update	3
AlumNet	4
Distinguished Alum. Prog.	4
Welcome Virginia Epsilon	4
2003 District Conferences	4
Educational Loans	4
California Epsilon's 50th	5
GIG Grants	5
Monstertrak.com	5
Chapter Anniversaries	5
Website Discussion	6
Issue available at www.tbp.org	

Meeting purpose—the “why”

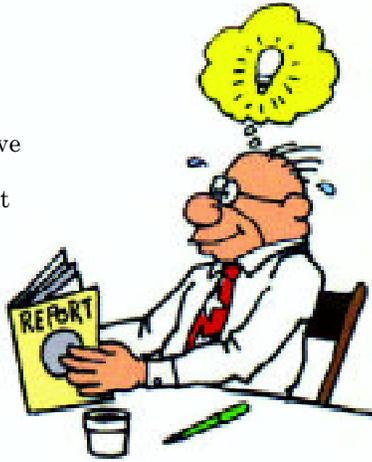
Have you ever been to a regular weekly meeting where there wasn't anything worthwhile to discuss? Have you ever been invited to a meeting where what they talked about wasn't what you wanted to talk about? A crucial first step in having an effective meeting is **clearly defining the purpose** of the meeting. What are you trying to accomplish? What would be the outcome if the meeting were successful? To ensure that this purpose is clearly defined and communicated, a meeting agenda is extremely helpful. One would hope that most meetings you've been to have at least had an agenda which includes the following:

- Logistics of meeting (time/date, duration, location), and
- Topics to be covered and duration of each topic.

However, more can be added, which can help focus the meeting even more tightly and effectively:

- Owner for each agenda topic: Who is going to kick off the discussion? What should that person be bringing to the meeting?
- Purpose of each agenda topic: Is the purpose of the topic to inform people? To make a decision on a proposed recommendation? To develop a position on a particular issue?
- Expected outcome of each agenda topic: What do you expect to happen after the topic is discussed? What exactly will people be asked to agree to, or to do, as a result of the agenda topic?

As a meeting leader, create and communicate a clear vision of where the meeting should go, and ensure that people come prepared to accomplish what you'd like to accomplish. As a participant in a meeting, make sure that you understand the purpose of the meeting and that you see an agenda in advance so that you know what you can bring to be most effective. If you don't see an agenda in advance, or if the meeting doesn't seem appropriately structured, consider asking why you need to be there, or propose revisions to the agenda to help make the meeting worth your and everyone else's time.



Meeting participants—the “who”

Have you ever been to a meeting that you really didn't need to attend? Have people been missing from a meeting where they were needed, either because they weren't invited or just didn't show up? Once the meeting purpose is clear, the necessary *participants* for the meeting should be much easier to figure out:



- Who has the right information to contribute to the discussion or the decision at hand?
- Who are the decision makers who need to be part of the discussion, so that they can make a good decision and so that the decision will actually be implemented?
- Who has to implement the decision and, therefore, needs to understand the logic behind it?

Think through these types of people, and make sure that the right people are going to be there. However, be careful not to let the group get too large. For tough decision-making, a group of 5-10 people is usually best to balance the need for a variety of views and expertise with the difficulty in getting a common agreement. With any more than 10

people, a meeting involving decision-making gets much more complicated. (A formal decision-making process or meeting structure, such as *Robert's Rules of Order*, or at least a shared understanding of how decisions will be made, will be important.)

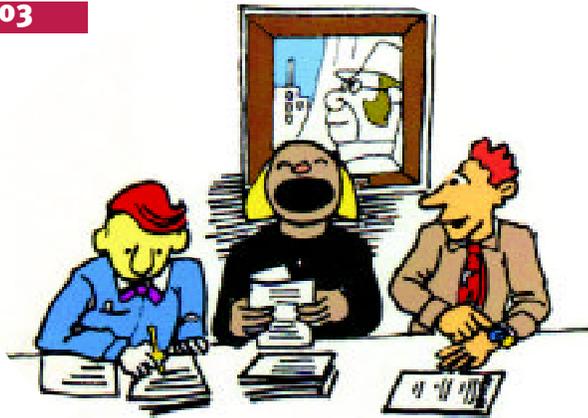
Meeting process—the “how”

Okay, the meeting has a clear purpose, and the right people are coming. So everything will work out fine, right? Not necessarily! The best agenda in the world doesn't guarantee that the meeting will follow it or that things will turn out just as you hope. How often have you seen the following things happen:

- Nobody seems to be sticking to the agenda—presentations are taking too long, people are asking too many questions (or questions that don't pertain to everyone), and people are wandering off the topic;
- Too much time is spent in level-setting the group on the topic at hand; and
- After the meeting, nobody is sure what was accomplished or what was decided.

To make the meeting actually live up to its potential requires a *fine balance* between forcing the meeting to the original plan (agenda) and knowing when and how far to allow things to vary from that plan as the meeting unfolds. Here are some hints on how to run the **process** side of the meeting to strike this balance effectively:

- Have a structure already in place for making and documenting decisions. For making decisions, is a vote OK? If voting, what if some people aren't there? If consensus is required, what does consensus mean exactly? How will you know when you've got it? (Don't assume that you'll be able to get everyone to agree to any plans with 100% excitement; if that ever does happen, beware—someone is probably forgetting something!) For documenting decisions, how will you track decisions that are made? How will people be held accountable? Some type of tracking is essential—people are too busy for you to be able to assume that they'll do something just because they agreed to it in the meeting. Even well-meaning people forget things or get distracted by



other crises; track what's been agreed to, and make sure that it gets done.

- Encourage people before the meeting to distribute and review pre-reading materials, and encourage people to ask questions of the presenters in advance (if the presenters are open to this), to save time during the meeting. (This keeps one-on-one questions from taking up everyone's time in the meeting. In addition, if pre-questions turn out to be relevant for the whole group, the presenter can then be better prepared to cover them during the meeting.)
- At the start of the meeting, review the agenda one last time with all the participants and get their buy-in that the agenda is still "right" for the meeting. (Do other topics need to be discussed? Are some topics irrelevant due to recent changes? Should topics be rearranged based on people's availability or the subject matter being discussed?)
- At the start of the meeting, appoint a timekeeper to watch the clock and let people know when the agenda is in danger of going off track. Get the participants' agreement that they'll tolerate interruptions from the timekeeper. (It's OK to let a topic extend over its agenda time if it's the right thing to do, but you need to ensure that these variations happen by agreement, not by accident.)
- At the end of the meeting, ensure that the group has documented the decisions and action items that have been agreed upon and that they'll be followed up in the future. (If a meeting has none of these, there's a high

probability that it was a non-productive meeting; make sure these types of items are documented to ensure that progress is made.)

Whether you're a group leader or a group member, take a few minutes to think through the meetings that you are a part of—how do they measure up to the standards mentioned here? If they're missing something, make some changes in how the meetings are set up, or discuss your ideas with the people who can make those changes. Do your part to move your meetings from being a "necessary evil" or an "evil tradition" to the next level of being a real opportunity for progress and learning. Good luck!

This article is inspired by the Group Process module from the Tau Beta Pi Engineering Futures Program. If you would like to learn more about the skills and tools necessary for successful meetings, contact Tau Beta Pi Headquarters to set up an Engineering Futures session on your campus!

Michael L. Peterson, IA A '89, is currently a team manager with the strategic-initiatives group (an internal strategy consulting department) at General Motors in Detroit, MI. His work has included leading teams and creating meetings to accomplish a variety of tasks, including developing strategies, analyzing new business opportunities, and defining and implementing changes to make processes and organizations more effective. Mike has also been an Engineering Futures Facilitator since the founding of EF in 1989, and has served as Chair of the EF Program Committee, as well as a Tau Beta Pi District 7 Director. He received



his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Iowa State University in 1989 and his master's degrees in mechanical engineering and management from MIT in 1994. He, his wife Michelle, and their three children

reside in Waterford, MI. If you would like to comment on or discuss some of the topics in this article, feel free to contact Mike at mlpeterson5@aol.com.

Database Update

By Raymond H. Thompson, Systems Administrator

Tau Beta Pi has successfully migrated its databases from FoxPro to SQL Server 2000. The transition went smoothly with no disruptions in service. There were a couple of glitches, but these were minor and quickly resolved. The biggest problem was with Boolean fields and the way they are handled and recognized by the processing scripts. Overall, the conversion was highly successful.

With the conversion complete, future tasks involve moving more of the outside processing to internal processing. has, because of necessity, relied on vendors to handle various tasks. With the ability to make changes freely to the database, can now incorporate needed data to accomplish what those vendors provided.

This movement to internal processing will provide several significant benefits to . First and foremost is cost savings. Eliminating these exter-

nal expenses is a direct reduction in operating costs. Second is to improve the service to the members of .

can now provide more accurate, up-to-date, information to its members when needed and provide this information in a more timely manner.

The last benefit, while intangible, is certainly significant. is now able to completely control the data. is always concerned about the quality of the data maintained. Outside vendors were not always so motivated. Removing the outside vendor will remove one more layer where "stuff happens" and the data becomes less than ideal.

will continue to improve the internal processes and the external interfaces to the members of . The next challenge is to radically renovate and improve the web interface process used to register for the Convention.

AlumNet

Tau Beta Pi's AlumNet Program pairs students with alumni to allow sharing of information about jobs and academe. To get in touch with an alumnus about a certain field, company, or institution, simply register on-line at www.tbp.org. Click on the AlumNet link under "For Members" and follow instructions.

Complete the brief, three-to-four line contact request form, and alumnus contact information will be sent to you by email from the program coordinator. It is the student's responsibility to follow-up and to make contact with the alumnus.

Alumni can register on-line in the same way described above. Encourage your peers to try out this service. AlumNet is one more example of the unique value of membership in Tau Beta Pi and another opportunity to gain life-long benefits from the Association.

SEEKING DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS NOMINEES

THE DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS AWARD recognizes members who have continued *to live up to the ideals of Tau Beta Pi as stated in our Eligibility Code and to foster a spirit of liberal culture throughout their lives after their college years*. These alumni serve as examples of excellence and leadership in character and liberal culture to collegiate members so as to influence their professional careers and personal lives.

Honored alumni have made exceptional efforts to demonstrate our ideals and to foster a spirit of liberal culture on local, national, and international scales. They have demonstrated integrity, breadth of interest, adaptability, and unselfish activity.

Future awardees will be chosen by a committee of national officers and invited to the Convention where they will each receive a special plaque and their achievements will be recognized. A \$2,000 Tau Beta Pi Scholarship will be named in honor of each Distinguished Alumnus.

Nominations are requested from

any individual member or any chapter, which may nominate any alumnus member or members, except a national official, for the award. There is no limit on the number of nominations. The following documentation in four sets must be sent to the Executive Director by March 15:

- (1) A one-page nomination form of biographical information and a summary of the achievements and/or contributions of the nominee exemplifying the objective of the award. (President's Book, C 32-33.)
- (2) A citation (one-page limit) appropriate for presentation, documenting the nominee's outstanding adherence to the Tau Beta Pi ideal of *fostering a spirit of liberal culture* in our society. It may be written by the nominating party.
- (3) Two letters of reference from persons, excluding the nominator(s) or sponsoring chapter president, knowledgeable about the nominee's contributions and achievements.

2003 District Conferences

The District Program provides a vital link between the national organization and individual chapters. Each year the Directors gather students for regional conferences to provide both retiring and new officers opportunities to discuss chapter operations and to socialize. All chapters are urged to elect new officers before their District conference. New and outgoing officers are urged to attend.

The 2003 schedule is:

Dist.	Location	Date
1	Boston, MA	March 1
2	Manhattan, NYC	March 1
3	Bethlehem, PA	Feb. 8
4	Norfolk, VA	April 5
5	Greenville, SC	April 5
6	Starkville, MS	Feb. 22
7	Cleveland, OH	April 5
8	South Bend, IN	April 5
9	Lincoln, NE	Feb. 22
10	San Antonio, TX	Feb. 8
11	Minneapolis, MN	March 29
12	Fort Collins, CO	March 1
13	El Paso, TX	April 5
14	Portland, OR	April 5
15	Stanford, CA	April 5
16	San Diego, CA	April 5

Welcome Virginia Epsilon

One new chapter chartered by the 2002 Convention has been installed with the initiation of its charter members this year. Virginia Epsilon officially came into being on March 1, 2003, at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond with President **Matthew W. Ohland** as official installing officer.

This brings the number of active collegiate chapters of Tau Beta Pi to 226. Stories of the installation and the harboring institution will appear in the Spring and Summer issues of THE BENT.

Student Assistance Fund

The Tau Beta Pi Student Assistance Fund was endowed in 1992 through the interest and generosity of C.C. Young, *Illinois Alpha '24*. Its purpose is to make funds available to student members of his and other chapters who would otherwise be without sufficient financial resources to remain in college. Repayment is not required, no interest is charged, and grantees are requested to help others in need should they become financially secure.

Interested students should write directly to Secretary-Treasurer Jim Froula at the national Headquarters in Knoxville, TN.

Educational Loan Fund

Since 1935, Tau Beta Pi has assisted student members with their financial needs while in school or with payment of their initiation fee through our Student Loan Fund. We are pleased to offer this service for student members in amounts up to \$2,500 per member.

Repayment is required after three years, and a simple interest rate of 6% is charged from the day the loan is received.

Interested students can obtain promissory notes and loan applications from their chapter presidents or directly from Secretary-Treasurer Jim Froula at the national Headquarters.



California Epsilon Celebrates 50th Anniversary

On Friday, December 6, 2002, the California Epsilon Chapter at UCLA celebrated its 50th anniversary with a dinner in the wood-paneled room in one of the original buildings on campus. Approximately 30 students, alumni, and faculty celebrated this important event with dinner and guest speaker Ronald M. Hickling, '80, former President of California Epsilon. Mr. Hickling has also served as District Director and Chair of the national Convention. We look forward to many more years of service to UCLA and Tau Beta Pi.

Samarth Pal, '03, *President*

\$\$\$ GIG Grants

Your chapter may receive up to \$750 to conduct a project involving civic affairs and public policy issues. The cash is available and waiting under Tau Beta Pi's Greater Interest in Government Program to involve students in their communities and the political process. Iowa Alpha, Maryland Beta, and Maryland Delta were recognized at the 2002 Convention for their interesting projects.

Send your chapter's proposal to the national Headquarters. Application guidelines are in Section C-IV of the President's Book on the website. There is no deadline, and joint chapter projects are encouraged.

Monstertrak.com

Tau Beta Pi has entered into a contract to create a special job-listing site for our members. More than 50,000 employers list their position openings with Monstertrak, advertising for entry-level and experienced full-time jobs, as well as internships.

To use the site, email Headquarters at tbp@tbp.org to request the password, using monstertrak in the subject. Then visit the site at www.monstertrak.com and begin your search. We ask only that you maintain the confidentiality of the password and tell us your own success story. Nearly 2,000 Tau Bates have requested the password.

2003 Chapter Anniversaries

- 75th SC Alpha Nov. 23, 1928
Clemson University
- IN Beta Dec. 8, 1928
Rose-Hulman Inst. of Tech.
- MS Alpha Dec. 15, 1928
Mississippi State University
- 50th OH Delta Feb. 21, 1953
Ohio University; Athens
- OH Epsilon Feb. 22, 1953
Univ. of Calif., Los Angeles
- 25th MI Eta Feb. 11, 1978
Lawrence Tech. University



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Important Deadlines

- GIG Project Proposal (any time)
- March 1
Scholarship Application
 - March 15
Distinguished Alumnus Nomination
Laureate Nomination
 - March 21
Outstanding Advisor Nomination
 - April 1
Constitution Ratification Ballot
 - June 1
Convention Bid for 2006

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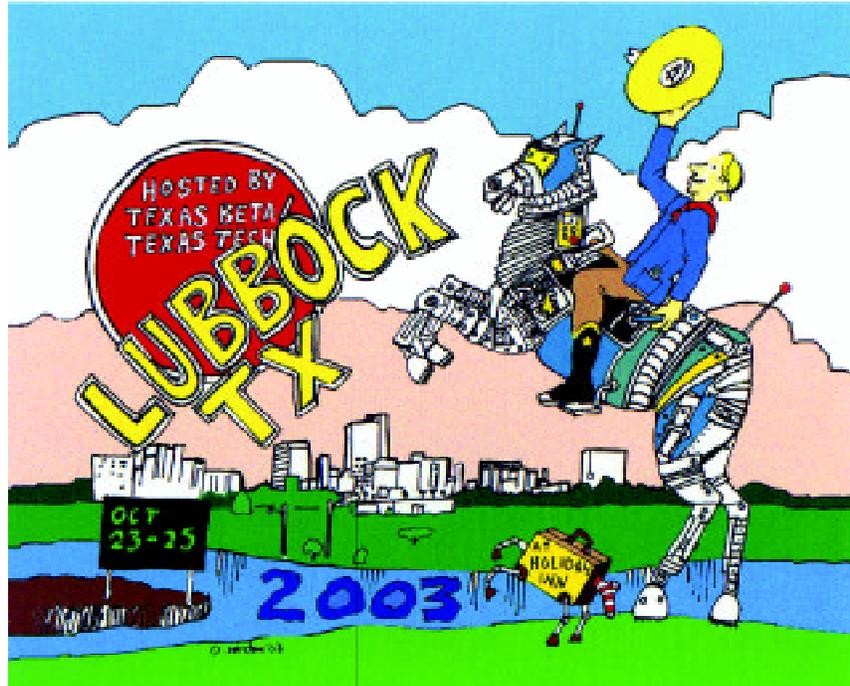
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LET'S TALK! WEBSITE FEATURES NEW DISCUSSION BOARD

Whether you are a student wondering if anyone out there has a great chapter fundraising idea, a District Director wanting to start a lively discussion about chapter membership, or an alumnus seeking a dialogue from Tau Bates working on the latest advancements in nanotechnology, the Discussion Board was created for you!

There is a link to the Discussion Board at www.tbp.org. Since its activation last year, there have been hundreds of hits, but few people are registering—which you must do to be able to post a message. When you register, your password is immediately emailed to you, so there is no waiting to begin your exchange. Here is an example of another useful benefit of membership in this great Association, so please don't be shy. Let's start talking!