

Through the last 7 years, the ASQ Education Program has certainly changed. But, one thing hasn't changed as the Education Chair for Pittsburgh, I have always enjoyed helping people – whether its giving advice on certifications, finding a training class (even if not with ASQ, or answering general ASQ questions. With that in mind, I would like to offer the following information, which may enable your organization to be effective as ASQ Pittsburgh.

Education Committee Operations

Looking back, my first task as Education Chair was to document the policies by which the Education Committee would operate. I drafted a procedure which was reviewed and approved by the Education Committee, instructors, and Executive Board. This procedure is still in effect today. Subsequent revisions are approved by the same group, and all changes are documented in a revision log.

Education Procedure

This procedure describes:

- Education committee, formation, and planning
- Instructor qualification and evaluation
- Course qualification and evaluation
- Course certificate qualification and issue policy
- Payments and discount policies
- Expenses reimbursement policy

The first few years, I personally handled the actual Education program operations, such as taking registrations and receiving payments. However, a career change for me meant significant traveling. That would mean that students had to leave messages on an answering machine. The thought of students and other potential ASQ clients leaving messages – as their *first contact* with ASQ – was unacceptable for an organization promoting “quality.” After much discussion and thought, the services of course registration and payment were subcontracted, thus freeing me to manage the group, rather than do it all. To effectively communicate the requirements of the Education Committee, I drafted an Education sign-up procedure, which proved to be very beneficial in training the subcontracted registration service, and even better, in organizing our volunteer organization to respond to the registration service.

Education Sign-up procedure

This procedure describes:

- Sign-up steps
- Confirmation of registration notification
- Payment steps
- Cancellation policy and steps

- Refund steps
- Certificate distribution
- Instructor contact information

For a non-profit organization, finding a cost-effective service proved to be no easy task. We were very fortunate to find the Engineers' Society of Western PA. (ESWP). Through a short learning curve, we have been able to team with the ESWP to provide the section and its members exceptional personal service in registering for courses and dinner meetings. Mr. David Teorsky and his staff are very familiar with our organization. I would highly recommend their services to any other section or non-profit organization. Mr. Teorsky may be reached at 412-261-4300 or d.teorsky@eswp.org.

Education Programs

The current education program has certainly changed over the last 7 years. Class size and the number of courses has diminished due to more competition from ASQ Headquarters in Milwaukee, consultants and educational institutions. However, the certification courses remain strong, as local sections continue to provide cost-effective solutions for those individuals seeking certification training courses. In the Pittsburgh area, this solution can certainly be attributed to the excellent instructors and their exam pass performance rates – Dick Kish (CQA), Nick Skovran (CQE), Teresa Whitacre (CQT/CMI), and Jeff Otte (CQManager), Robin Dudash (CSQE), and our most recent instructor, Brad Nelson (CRE).

In particular, the Certified Quality Manager Refresher Course experienced a big reduction in attendance when ASQ Milwaukee announced their self-study program. A year later the section-taught course regained its attendance when students did not pass the certification exam on merely self-study. They discovered the importance of interaction with an instructor, and in particular feedback on the essay writing. The number one reason that people come up short on the CQManager is failure on these constructed responses. Mr. Otte has a degree in English Writing and is cited by many students as helping them over that particular hurdle. Our course also takes advantage of the distinction of using certified materials from ASQ Milwaukee that can be taught only by approved instructors. These instructors have attended a class taught by National and have the approval of their section or division.

In another case, the Certified Quality Auditor refresher course experienced a small reduction in students, due to competition from – *just about everybody*, in particular the RAB Internal Auditor Certification. Although the student base has eroded, this class has remained strong due to Mr. Kish's teaching abilities and greater than 85% exam pass performance rate. From a personal perspective, I did not pass the CQA exam the first time, opting for the self-study method. I sadly discovered that “what you do internally at work” and “what is commonly accepted as the right way” can be two different exam answers. Instructor interaction, again, proved very important for the CQA exam. This interaction is also true for all exams. The instructors can provide practice questions and

detailed explanations – so the students learn how to APPLY the information, not just pass and exam.

A few years ago the Education Committee combined the Certified Quality Technician and Mechanical Inspector refresher courses. With the reduction in enrollments, neither course had enough students to run on its own. Courses were being cancelled, and that is not a good reputation for a program to start. We decided to take advantage that the instructor, Ms. Whitacre, has been certified in both areas, and that the body of knowledge for both certifications is similar. This decision turned out to be a ‘win-win’ for all concerned. The CQT/CMI refresher course also continues to be one of the more popular on-site courses. It is worth noting that Ms. Whitacre was our first instructor to offer an alternative to the classroom experience. She offers a correspondence version of the CQT/CMI for long distance learning. Several individuals have taken advantage of this opportunity.

Internet

With the strong influx of internet usage, the importance of an updated website has been a prominent communication tool for the Education program. The ASQ Pittsburgh section website is also capable of accepting registrations and credit care payments on line. This function is tracked and processed through ESWP and coordinated with us. This feature has been extended such that members can now register electronically for the monthly dinner meetings.

A few years ago, the Certified Software Quality Engineer (CSQE) refresher course was placed on-line. Noting the infancy of this certification and availability of competing courses, the opportunity was taken to offer this course in its entirety over the internet (visit www.iqps.net). This course is the same successful course that has been publicly offered, over the last 6 years. The public course has enjoyed a 95% exam pass rate performance rate, since the course’s inception. The ASQ CSQE certification competes with several existing software certifications. However, those existing certifications are very knowledge specific – i.e. testing, etc. The ASQ software certification presents a more comprehensive body of knowledge to promote the management and improvement of the software development process. The ultimate key to success for the CSQE certification will be marketing.

Future – Marketing, Marketing, Marketing

The future of the ASQ Education program will rely on ASQ Headquarters (as well as other prominent business groups) ability to market not only the importance of employing certified individuals, but also on promoting quality based methodologies. With the recent layoffs and cost-cutting measures, I think it is safe to say that quality has taken a step back. There are still a few companies where quality is considered an investment to make the company cost-competitive. These companies know that quality is NOT an expense. These companies should come out of the recession even stronger, and will be ready to invest in training for new hires. Several Pittsburgh companies now require the

Mechanical Inspector or Quality Technician certifications to qualify their inspectors and QA staff.

Furthermore, the ASQ organization needs to build an awareness with “Generation X.” These are the up and coming individuals who may or may not be aware of, or appreciate, the quality methods, networking, and education that ASQ has to offer its members. To help address this issue, the section participates in the Young Engineers’ Society Conference every year.

The Pittsburgh Education Committee has taken a few steps of its own in marketing – steps I believe have assisted in maintaining a successful program. I wrote a few articles. In particular, an article “Why Should I be Certified?” communicating the importance of certification to both those who are concerned about/who have already lost their jobs, and to companies on the importance of hiring certified individuals. We, as a Section, have also become a knowledge resource for acquiring state funding for on-site training. Our marketing efforts have made companies aware that our courses are eligible for state funding. Of course, the on-site courses are tailored towards the individual company’s needs. This was most recently evidenced for the Certified Reliability Engineering Refresher course where the actual application of reliability tools for a product being designed was part of the classroom activities.

Conclusion

Local ASQ Education committees offer certification training and professional learning experiences for individuals as well as companies. These courses are taught by recognized, certified leaders in their field. Certification is your way to have your skills and expertise recognized by your professional peers and by your employer. Given the memorable tire recalls (and the proliferation of product liability lawsuits) drives home a seemingly mundane truth as only a crisis can – QUALITY STILL MATTERS

Ms. Dudash has been a Senior ASQ member since 1994 and the ASQ Pittsburgh Education Chair for the last 8 consecutive years. She has also taught the CSQE Refresher course based on the ASQ BOK. Robin has degrees in Computer Science and Applied Mathematics, and an MBA, concentrating in finance, from the University of Pittsburgh. Ms. Dudash holds CQManager, CQA, CQE, CRE, CSQE, QS-LA, and QS-9000 certifications. She may be contacted at www.iqps.net and iqps@aol.com for more information on the resources mentioned in the article.