



JAY WOOTTEN

Portrait of a Volunteer

In this feature, Judith "Jay" Wootton shares her views on volunteerism at NCTE (principally through TYCA and CCCC) and how it has enriched her professional career.

Jay is an assistant professor of English at Kent State University. She has published a broad selection of articles, presented at conferences, conducted workshops and has been active in a wide range of service activities.

What motivated you to volunteer for NCTE service?

I've been attending CCCC since around 1980, and it seemed to me that I should give something back to the organization that has supported me over the years. I first became involved in the two-year-college regional conference before the birth of TYCA. As TYCA developed, I found myself interested in the formal operations of NCTE and CCCC.

What has kept you interested in volunteering your time over the years?

The people have—both other volunteers and the NCTE staff. I have benefited from interacting with some of the brightest, most active, interesting people in my field, and I've learned about other institutions and the state of higher education in other states. I find the differences fascinating, but the similarities keep me from insular thinking. The NCTE staff is also wonderfully adept at dealing with volunteers who are often late and usually in a hurry when they do get their work done.

What does your current role entail?

Right now, I'm Assistant CCCC Chair, which means that I am program chair for the 2005 CCCC Convention in San Francisco. As Assistant Chair, I'm part of the officers' team, and I serve on the Executive Committee. I will cycle through as Associate Chair, Chair, and Immediate Past Chair.

What key roles have you played and what did you find most satisfying in carrying them out?

I was chair of TYCA—MW and national TYCA. Working with my colleagues to build an organization focused on helping colleagues is extremely satisfying. Serving on the NCTE Executive Committee was particularly satisfying because it gave me the opportunity to watch and participate in decision making across the full spectrum of English and the language arts. Working with colleagues from all kinds of institutions to solve a problem or to recommend an action to the Executive Committee (of NCTE or CCCC) and seeing results is extremely rewarding.

What satisfactions do you derive from volunteering?

The friendships I've developed around the country, the colleagues I can call upon for help with projects and to critique my ideas, are my chief satisfactions, but there's also the satisfaction of completing a task that one believes is meaningful to the profession.

Why would you recommend volunteering to another NCTE member?

I can't think of a better way to see beyond one's institutional walls or to get a national perspective on issues, problems, or solutions. If nothing else, the interaction with colleagues in institutional types different from one's own is eye-opening and energizing.

How or has your affiliation with NCTE, CCCC, and TYCA improved your professional development and career?

I have expanded my points of view by working with others and internalizing various perspectives and ways of seeing that I otherwise would not have. The payoff for me is personal and well worth the effort.

Do you have a favorite NCTE publication?

TETYC is my favorite publication.

What is the one book, article, or professional development experience you would recommend to other educators?

I couldn't list just one book or article, but I definitely recommend regular attendance at CCCC Convention and participation in special interest groups, caucuses, and workshops. For faculty who teach the first two years of college English, I strongly recommend the seven regional two-year-college conferences. These conferences are smaller and generally more focused on pedagogy; they are also an opportunity to connect with colleagues and make friends to meet at CCCC Convention.

How has being part of an educational community like NCTE improved your abilities as a teacher and as a leader?

I continually learn new strategies, approaches, and ideas about teaching through NCTE and its constituent groups. I've learned by watching the leaders in my profession debate and decide how to fund equally valuable proposals with limited resources, or which of several good ideas should be the focus of limited human resources. The process of reaching consensus in large and varied organizations is in itself interesting, and it has helped me work toward consensus in my own institution when emotions run high.