



# TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

## **TESOL Board Connect: The Rewards of Being a TESOL Member**

by [Justin Shewell](#)

I was first introduced to the concept of a professional association while studying as an undergrad in the BA TESOL program at Brigham Young University (BYU)–Hawaii. We had a small student-run organization on campus called the BYU-Hawaii TESOL Society, and we had regular meetings where we did workshops and general professional development, as well as social gatherings. We also organized trips to events in the larger community, including the annual conference of the local TESOL affiliate, [Hawai‘i TESOL](#). I was always thrilled to meet other students and TESOL professionals and learn about what they were doing in their classrooms. Our professors always encouraged us to participate in association events and stressed how professional associations contributed to our development as TESOL professionals.

I served as president of the BYU-Hawaii TESOL Society for 2 years. Just before my second year ended, we decided to organize a trip to the 34th Annual TESOL Convention in Vancouver, Canada. We held many fundraising events throughout the months leading up to the Convention, and through a generous donation of scholarship funds, we were able to raise the money to send the first-ever group of TESOL undergraduate students from BYU-Hawaii to the Annual TESOL Convention. The experience of attending the Annual Convention was amazing and it was such a good experience that BYU-Hawaii has sent a group of students to the Convention every year since. But that is a story for another time.

As part of registering for my first-ever TESOL Convention, I joined TESOL as a student-member, mainly to get the discounted conference registration rate, and for the first few years, my activity and use of my [TESOL membership](#) was tied to my Convention attendance. I couldn’t attend the Annual Conventions in St. Louis in 2001 and Salt Lake in 2002, and I think I chose not to renew my membership, opting instead to join the local TESOL affiliate in Korea, where I was working at the time. I enjoyed the professional development events and connecting with local TESOL professionals, but when I attended my next TESOL Convention in Baltimore in 2003, I renewed my TESOL membership.

It was then that I began to realize the benefits of being a part of an international association of TESOL professionals. I joined several of the interest sections, which gave me access to their email lists. I reached out via email to the lists a few times when I had questions or needed ideas for lesson plans or materials, and I was amazed at the responses I got. Since then, I have had opportunities to interact with some of the profession’s biggest names and share ideas and

resources via the interest section email lists. At first, I was surprised that someone who wrote a textbook I used in my TESOL program would take the time to respond to an email from a student in an interest section email list, but I soon came to realize the community and sense of family that TESOL members share. Now, years later, when I see emails from students and new TESOL members, I do my best to respond and share ideas and give them that same sense of belonging.

Another benefit of my TESOL membership that I made great use of was the free subscription to [\*TESOL Journal\*](#). Each issue was full of great ideas for lessons, reports of the latest research being done in the field, teaching tips, and many other resources that gave me inspiration for my own classes. I also enjoyed receiving the [\*English Language Bulletin\*](#), with links to articles and other TESOL-related resources.

In more recent years, I have applied for and received [TESOL awards](#), including the Albert H. Marckwardt Travel Grant in 2011 and the Betty Azar Professional Development Travel Grant in 2017, which helped me attend the Convention. I also received the D. Scott Enright TESOL Interest Section Service Award for my service to the Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section, which was a highlight of my career.

I have also purchased several books and other materials from the [TESOL Bookstore](#) at discounted member rates, and sent letters to my elected officials through the [TESOL Advocacy Action Center](#). These are all things I wouldn't have been able to do without my TESOL membership. However, the biggest benefit I have received from my TESOL membership has been the opportunity to serve my fellow TESOL members and the profession in volunteer leadership positions over the years.

I began by getting involved with the Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section, first serving on the steering committee and then as chair-elect, chair, and past chair. I had the opportunity to serve on the Awards Committee, coordinating one of the aforementioned TESOL awards, and to serve as chair of the committee before being elected to the Nominating Committee. Serving on the Nominating Committee and having the opportunity to help choose the people to be on the ballot and potentially lead TESOL into the future was a humbling experience. Even more humbling has been my service these last 3 years as a member of the TESOL Board of Directors. Every volunteer leader gives of their time, their efforts, and their heart to further the mission of TESOL International Association, and I count myself honored to be among such a wonderful group of TESOL professionals that care about the members and the well-being of the association and the profession.

None of these experiences would have been possible without TESOL membership. That is why I have renewed my TESOL membership every year, even when money was tight and I wasn't sure I could afford the membership fees, because I realize that the value I get for the membership fee far outweighs the monetary value of the fee itself. If you are on the fence about joining or renewing your membership, I strongly encourage you to consider the benefits to your career and professional development, and to think about all the good you could do by connecting with other TESOL members, sharing ideas, and perhaps even serving as a volunteer leader yourself.

In the words of late TESOL International Association founder James E. Alatis, “We are an organization dedicated to fostering and maintaining excellence in our profession.” Now don’t you want to be a part of THAT?

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