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## ECT and AECT: Opening Doors For Student Development

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In 2003, I attended my first AECT conference. As a first-year master's student, I was excited but overwhelmed; however, I quickly learned that AECT is an organization where even newcomers can be involved. One day, I saw a description of a session for "leadership development." Because I was brand new to AECT, and to the field of instructional design, I knew I needed development if I ever hoped to be a leader! I found the room with the door open and walked in and sat down. I quickly learned that this was a session for those who train new leaders—not for those like me who needed the training. Still, the group did not make me feel awkward or unwelcome, and they even invited me to stay and participate!

I have since learned that with AECT, the door is almost always open for people to enter and be involved. I have more than once walked into division meetings, curious to learn about their group, and left with an assignment. This has led to incredible opportunities to serve alongside leaders and great mentors. I feel that I have always gained more than I gave in my service to AECT because of the mentors who have worked with me.

This year, I was fortunate to be chosen as one of the ECT interns. I found many more doors open to me as an intern, and again I gained new friendships and insights to the association and the field. For example, I was able to see how presidential task forces work behind the scenes to bring great ideas to light. I learned the legacy and history of the AECT organization and its past leaders. I learned more about the publishing business through observing the editorial board meeting of *Educational Technology, Research, & Development*. Finally, I learned tips for building my career from great scholars and professionals who attended our intern breakfasts or introduced themselves to me throughout the week. It was definitely a week I will never forget and an experience that left me feeling much better prepared to join the professional ranks after my graduation.

Because I am near graduation, I am often asked by new graduate students what they can do to be successful in graduate school. My advice is nearly always to attend the AECT conference, and ask if they can be involved in any interesting divisions and committees. Then I advise them to apply for the ECT intern program and the many other ECT awards. From my experience, ECT and AECT together offer more open doors and opportunities for growth, friendship, and learning than any other professional organization that I know.