

## New accreditation option opens doors for senior communicators

Participants call IABC's first Executive Accreditation Seminar intense and rewarding

by Anna M. Willey, ABC

**fast track to the abc**  
The next Executive Accreditation Seminar is scheduled for September. Details are available at [www.iabc.com/abc](http://www.iabc.com/abc).

Century-old gardens and forested grounds aren't the typical setting for earning the Accredited Business Communicator designation, but they were for IABC's inaugural six-day Executive Accreditation Seminar, held in March at Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia.

The drawing room of Hatley Castle, the centerpiece of Royal Roads' historic campus, buzzed as 29 senior business communi-

cators from North America, Europe and the Caribbean (pictured below) shared experiences from their extensive communication base working in everything from aerospace engineering to health care. It wasn't long before the IABC networking bug had lifelong friendships budding at this ocean-side university, whose curriculum is designed for working professionals.

### Concentrated approach

The expedited pathway to the ABC designation came after

nearly two years of development between Royal Roads University and IABC.

The seminar integrated the elements of the traditional accreditation process—a strategic portfolio submission, a related oral presentation to peers and evaluators, and a question-and-answer session—with a formal on-site assessment, a team communication leadership challenge and presentation, and a rigorous weeklong communication and leadership curriculum, culminating in a 3.5-hour written exam.

Any notion that the six-day program would be easier than the traditional process was dispelled right away, and a flip-chart easel labeled “What are you worried about?” was quickly plastered with questions: “What's the best way for us to ensure success on the exam?” and “What happens if I don't pass my portfolio?”

IABC's lead facilitators, Tamara Gillis, Ed.D., ABC, professor of communications at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, and Nick Durutta, ABC, of The Capital Group of Companies in Los Angeles, helped calm fears with modules focused on exam preparedness, professional ethics, setting measurable objectives, evaluation



processes and audience analysis.

“Working with the candidates in this immersion program was compelling,” said Gillis. “As an instructor, I could see them applying learning from session to session to improve their work plans and strategic thinking.”

Laura Asbjornsen, head of corporate communications for Caribbean Airlines, drew a similar conclusion. “For me, the seminar was a chance to compare my current work portfolio to [those of] my peers across the globe,” she said. “Coming from Trinidad and Tobago, I strongly believe that operating your communication projects on a small island does not mean you can adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude. Being smaller means you have to know what the competition is doing and achieve the same results with fewer resources.”

### Participants tackle real-world case study

Leadership management modules were led by Tammy Dewar, Ph.D., and Dave Whittington, Ph.D., both faculty members of Royal Roads’ Centre for Applied Leadership and Management, which offers executive education and customized programming for organizations.

The real-world communication leadership challenge—“from homelessness to homefulness”—focused on Woodwynn Farms, a nonprofit therapeutic community for the homeless located on a working organic farm near Victoria. Working in teams, candidates prepared a

strategic communication plan that they presented to Richard Leblanc, Woodwynn’s founder.

“The communication leadership presentations significantly exceeded our expectations,” Leblanc said. “We look forward to implementing many of the recommendations.”

James Lynch, vice president of communications for American Express in New York City, noted, “I went hoping to gain some new leadership insights and a professional edge. I feel I got both of those benefits. But I also left with something else: an incredible sense of community. That was an unexpected gift.”

Lynch said the experience was different from other seminars he has attended. “Let’s face it: Being a communication professional can feel (and be) pretty lonely at times. The EAS helped me realize another aspect of what it means to want to be an Accredited Business Communicator. It means you’re looking for a sense of belonging. It makes you realize you’re part of a community of peers—true communicator peers.”

Deborah Hudson, global head of internal communications for Zurich Insurance Company Ltd. in Switzerland, agreed. “The Executive Accreditation Seminar was a once-in-a-lifetime professional experience,” she said. “The leadership challenge—where in teams we developed six very different strategic communication plans for the same business—was an inspiration. Imagine the power of being able to get inside the

creative process of senior communicators as they develop solutions for business!”

### Ideal for busy communicators

The Executive Accreditation Seminar offers a pathway to accreditation that fits many senior communicators’ personal agendas.

“I’d looked at pursuing my IABC accreditation before, but the stars just never seemed to align,” said Rob Stevenson, consulting director for Media-Match West Communications in Edmonton, Alberta, who, like a number of the candidates, works to balance the needs of a young family with a hectic work schedule. “The condensed, candidate-first mentality of the EAS allowed me to completely focus on the accreditation process and to fully embrace both the challenge and accomplishment of accreditation. Having immediate access to some of the world’s top communicators, all gathered in one place, offered a networking and collaborative learning experience I’ve never been part of before. It truly brought home the notion that regardless of the organization, the truly excellent ones are those that have completely integrated and embraced the communication process.”

Likewise, Mary Lynn Carver, senior vice president of public relations at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, said the new accreditation option worked for her.

“Obtaining my ABC was something that has been on my

### call for presentations: 2011 iabc conferences

IABC invites presentation proposals from qualified experts who meet the association’s criteria for educating communication practitioners to excel professionally and improve organizational performance. The deadline for speaker proposals for IABC’s 2011 conferences is 30 July. Visit [www.iabc.com/education/cfp](http://www.iabc.com/education/cfp) to get details and access the presentation proposal form.

professional to-do list for some time, but fitting it in with other business priorities was difficult,” she said. “The seminar provided an opportunity to compress the accreditation process into a single—albeit intense—week.”

“The instruction was world-class and reinforced key aspects of our profession that are often overlooked by the busy practitioner,” said Dave McGrath, director of marketing and communications for Vector Aerospace Corp. in Langley, British Columbia. “Having the opportunity to work with and learn from 29 of the sharpest minds in our profession, representing industries and countries from around the globe, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

“There is an intense schedule, and you must check your professional ego at the door if you are to maintain the pace,” added

Barbara Shumsky, manager for Syncrude Canada. “There is no doubt you’ll become tired, but you must consider the seminar as a journey in which, at the end of each day when you hit the pillow, you’ve traveled a few more miles. Each day feels better than the last, and by Friday, once you sit for the exam, you’re ready. I can honestly say that by the end I felt renewed as a communications professional.”

Shumsky, a communication practitioner for 20 years, said she would highly recommend the program to others.

Gretchen Anthony, president of the communication firm Tilt Consulting in Colorado, summed it up, saying the Executive Accreditation Seminar gave her a new, international network of colleagues and peers she will keep in touch with and continue to learn from and be

inspired by. “I finished my graduate program over a decade ago and haven’t been back to school since,” she said. “But ‘hitting the books,’ as I did in preparation for EAS, and becoming comprehensively literate in the communications field, as the seminar required, will be a great asset to my career. I’m already putting a number of the concepts we covered academically into practical application.”

### Trust: The main thing

In the April episode of IABC’s CW Radio podcast, *Communication World* Executive Editor Natasha Nicholson chatted with Pamela Shockley-Zalabak, co-author of *Building the High-Trust Organization: Strategies for Supporting Five Key Dimensions of Trust* (Jossey-Bass, 2010), about what creates organizational trust and why it’s impor-

## meet the 2010 iabc award recipients

### IABC Fellow: William Briggs, Ed.D.

2010 IABC Fellow William Briggs is director and tenured professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at San Jose State University in California. He has more than three decades of experience as a professional communicator, and has contributed to the advancement of international communication through teaching, research, speaking engagements, and leading and hosting delegations globally. He also founded the Pacific Rim Institute and the Global Studies Institute at San Jose State University. Briggs has served as director of IABC’s international executive board, trustee of the IABC Research Foundation, chair of IABC’s ethics committee and judge on the Gold Quill Awards Blue Ribbon Panel. He is IABC’s representative to the Global Alliance

for Public Relations and Communication Management (for curriculum), and is actively involved with IABC/Silicon Valley.

### IABC Fellow: Annette Martell, ABC, MC

2010 IABC Fellow Annette Martell is an independent management consultant and a founding associate of PowerIn, an international alliance of senior consultants. Her client work is informed by more than 20 years of communication experience from a variety of international and domestic communication management positions. She has held several leadership positions, including 2002–2003 IABC chair, IABC’s representative to the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management since 2005, Gold Quill Awards Blue Ribbon Panel judge, chair of IABC’s international executive board nominations committee, selections committee chair for IABC Canada’s 2010 Master Communicator, and president

of the IABC/Atlantic Canada chapter. She is the recipient of several national and international communication honors and awards, and is a frequent speaker at IABC and other industry events.

### Chairman’s Award: Sonja Tiscenko

Based in Tanzania, 2010 Chairman’s Award winner Sonja Tiscenko recently left her full-time position as communication manager for REPOA, a nonprofit socioeconomic research organization, to pursue studies in communication management. She is a founding (and continuing) board member of IABC’s chapter in Tanzania, where she is involved in planning and hosting IABC events, and a member of IABC’s Knowledge Centre editorial advisory panel.

*The awards were presented on 6 June at the opening general session of the IABC 2010 World Conference in Toronto.*

tant. Here is an excerpt from their conversation.

**Natasha Nicholson:** You say that trust is the essential element of organizational success. How does trust ensure an organization's success, and how does distrust lead to failure?

**Pamela Shockley-Zalabak:** Almost a decade of looking at terrific research from over 3,500 studies supports that organizations with high-trust profiles are more profitable, are more likely to achieve their goals, have lower litigation costs, have less employee turnover, have better organizational satisfaction, and are able to do flexible innovation. Trust is the glue that holds all of the elements of creativity and innovation together. You also asked how distrust leads to failure. People won't share good ideas or mistakes with their organization if they don't trust what's going on. Innovation is much lower in organizations with low-trust profiles. You also find sabotage or other destructive employee behaviors in organizations where there is a lot of distrust going on. And you don't have stakeholder loyalty in these organizations.

**NN:** Your model of organizational trust introduces five key drivers: competence, openness and honesty, concern for stakeholders, reliability, and identification. Can you talk about those drivers and what they mean?

**PSZ:** It starts with competence. I may trust you as an individual, but if I do not trust that this organization or my management is competent in meeting the challenges of the future, I will distrust that the organization is

going to survive, meet its goals or be effective with its stakeholders.

The same thing is true with openness and honesty. All too often we have organizations where people actually have very high integrity, but they're struggling with issues and aren't forthcoming with their stakeholders about those issues. That silence generates distrust.

Concern for employees and stakeholders is not only a communication concern but also a concern for our practices, how we deal with people, even when we maybe have made a mistake or they have made a mistake.

The fourth dimension is reliability: How consistent am I? Do my words and actions match? Some people confuse reliability with sameness, and it isn't sameness at all. There are times we must change. Do I communicate reliably, regularly and with various stakeholders about that need for change?

And finally, identification: Can I see my own personal goals and values aligned with that of the organization? It's clear in just huge numbers of studies that I am more likely to trust an organization where I see my basic values, goals and principles at work than those where I don't.

**NN:** What would you recommend organizations do to start earning their employees' trust?

**PSZ:** The first thing I would recommend is assessing the current level of trust in each of the five drivers. Then examine each of the areas—competence, for example. How do we exhibit competence? Are there areas where we need to build our competence? A lot of people

think trust is some kind of squishy, not-very-concrete, abstract concept, and to a certain extent it's true, but all of our behaviors and actions have a trust dimension. So I recommend getting people aware of the drivers of trust, assessing the current level of trust and then creating strategies—where we're strong to keep reinforcing it, where we're weak, modifying what we're doing to improve trust, and then how do we move forward. That's what I always tell organizations, to help them in a concrete way to move through that process.

To hear the full interview, visit <http://cafe2go.x.iabc.com/category/cw-radio>. Building the High-Trust Organization is available at [www.iabc.com/knowledge](http://www.iabc.com/knowledge). •

### mark your calendar

- 12 August** *Teleseminar:* Developing Your Accreditation Portfolio
- 15 September** *Web seminar:* Corporate Communications 3.0: 7 Ways You Can Be Relevant 5 Years from Now
- 29 September** *Web seminar:* Media Coaching for Media Coaches: Insights on Shaping the Spokesperson's Character, Content, Charisma and Leadership
- 30 September** *Workshop (Houston, Texas):* Strategic Communication Workshop
- 7 October** *Teleseminar:* Preparing for Your Accreditation Exam
- 8 October** *Conference (New York City):* Corporate Communication and Social Media Conference
- 14 October** *Workshop (Washington, D.C.):* Strategic Communication Workshop
- 17–19 October** *Conference (Palo Alto, California):* 2010 IABC Pacific Plains Region EXCHANGE Conference
- 17–19 October** *Conference (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania):* 2010 IABC Heritage Region Conference
- 28–29 October** *Conference (Chicago):* Employee Communication Conference

For more information about these and other events, go to [www.iabc.com/education](http://www.iabc.com/education).

