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USENIX & SAGE

**The Advanced Computing Systems Association &
The System Administrators Guild**

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SAGE ELECTS NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR 2001–2003 TERM

The SAGE Executive Committee positions for the 2001–2003 term are as follows:

Strata Chalup
Barbara Dijker
Tim Gassaway
Geoff Halprin
Trey Harris
David Parter
Peg Schafer

Not elected:

Bryan C. Andregg
John Sellens
Andres Silva

For the first time, voting for the SAGE Executive Committee was conducted electronically.

Total number of SAGE members eligible to vote: 4861
Total number of votes cast: 606
Number of postal ballots: 3
Response rate: 12.5%
Total invalid ballots: 0

The newly elected SAGE Executive Committee members met in Berkeley, California, on March 9–10, 2001. For more information about the SAGE Executive Committee, please see:

<*http://www.usenix.org/sage/people/Current-Board.html*>.

SAGE Certification Project Update

by Lois Bennett
Member, SAGE Certification Committee
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The SAGE Certification Project continues to move forward. Patrons continue to be approached, the job description for Director of Certification has been approved by the Policy Committee, and the process of selecting marketing firms to help promote the Project is underway. Meanwhile, test writing for the first level examination has begun in earnest. However, the process of writing the actual questions has prompted a need for clarification about the basic aims of the first level of certification.

When certification was first embarked on, it was the intention of the SAGE Executive Committee that it be a vendor-neutral, platform-neutral, certification test concentrating on underlying principles and accepted practices. Eliminating such biases is essential, but hardly straightforward in practice. The questions are being written from the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) used in the occupational analysis of 1999, which sound UNIX-centric because nearly all the survey respondents were UNIX System Administrators. And as we had anticipated, writing questions that are both specific and vendor/platform–neutral is not easy.

But the Certification Policy Committee (CPC) believes that UNIX or NT bias can be removed. These issues absorbed much of the discussion at the February meeting, and some important clarifications were made. The result was to refine the focus of the SAGE Certification Project, as follows:

The Certified System Administrator (CSA) is a single, vendor neutral, platform neutral test concentrating on the underlying principles, concepts, and accepted practices within each KSA area. All questions developed by the Test Development Committee (TDC) are to be derived from the KSA document already supplied. This will be augmented at a later time with further documents. All questions are to be platform/vendor independent, although it is recognized that draft questions may include platform specifics to be later discussed, and revised so as to be platform-independent.

This focus should in turn make for clearer guidelines for the test writers. It was acknowledged that the existing KSA base needs to be reviewed and potentially supplemented with additional accepted practice areas.

The point, in other words, is to write questions that probe the understanding of underlying computing principles, rather than the peculiarities of NT, UNIX, or other operating systems. This reflects our "market differentiator": the value of this test, as opposed to others on the market, is that it will establish accepted practice standards at a level beyond specific operating systems.

The test writing that has been done so far has been informed by a workshop on good test writing practice led by Gordon Waugh of The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) at the TDC meeting, after December's LISA conference. The two-day workshop gave basic principles of writing effective multiple choice tests and an opportunity to come up with examples and critique them for practice.

Fifteen SAGE level IV system administrators are on the team, including four women. Two members of the CPC are serving as test developers to serve as liaisons and to further the project.

The TDC will be meeting again in April for an intense session to review the questions that have been written. Each writer is tasked with drafting 40 questions, with a goal of 450 total items for the beta testing in June.

Director of Certification

The CPC approved a job description for a program director. It was agreed that the program director will be hired by USENIX but does not need to be seated in the Berkeley office. It will be up to the program director to decide where support staff work. Eventually a centralized office will need to be established. In other work in the areas of leadership, governance, and management the subcommittee presented a revised organizational chart which we amended and approved. Below is a summary of the job description. Inquiries about this position should be directed to Gale Berkowitz at *<gale@usenix.org>*.

"Supervises and directs the activities of all project staff and consultants, and coordinates the activities of volunteer leadership. Implements directives of the SAGE Certification Board. Is accountable to the SAGE Certification Board and the SAGE Executive Committee. Recommends and participates in formulating organization policies to achieve the goals established for the organization. Enforces administration of policies. Recommends and participates in planning immediate and long-term goals. Makes decisions appropriate to the implementation and execution of organization projects. Plans, manages, supervises, and directs all project functions. Develops policies and procedures for the project staff and determines goals and objectives for the project staff. Hires and evaluates project staff. Manages all contracts with consultants and testing organizations. Develops and administers annual project budget. Monitors fiscal expenditures of the organization and its committees. Serves as the Liaison between the project, its committees, SAGE, and other organizations with related interests."

Business Plan

We briefly discussed the executive summary of the business plan drafted by Mark Stingley and accepted it. This four-page document will be used in the fundraising and marketing efforts and is now available on the SAGE Certification Web site at
<http://www.usenix.org/sage/cert/business_plan.html>.

The Funding and Patronage Subcommittee will continue to contact the potential patrons and the committee was urged to provide him warm contacts.

In discussions with the Architecture Subcommittee we decided we are going to rely on the SAGE Job Descriptions for the description of the certification levels. There will be exam prerequisites, but they will not be verified for the first level of the exam.

With the Accreditation and Education Subcommittee we determined that the purpose of accreditation is quality control. Accredited institutions must have instructors with degrees in relevant areas, have appropriate experience teaching in the relevant areas, and the curriculum/teaching materials must be submitted to the SAGE Certification Program for review and approval. It was decided not to work with the universities on the development of training in the short term, but rather target the smaller training/learning centers.

The Marketing Committee's current focus is reviewing and recommending appropriate marketing firms.

The Administration and Procedures Subcommittee has been addressing applications, appeals, reinstatements, legal compliance, examination delivery,

certification acknowledgment, and operations maintenance. The program director will implement the policies and procedures. A first draft of the policies and procedures for the administration of the program is well underway.

Ethics and Discipline Subcommittee is working on a draft policy document (a draft presented in December suffered from scope creep). The plan is to rely on the SAGE Code of Ethics The committee is continuing to develop the consequences of fraud and cheating.

For more information about the SAGE Certification Project, please visit *<http://www.usenix.org/sage/cert/>*.

SAGE Certification Policy Committee hard at work. More photos can be found at <http://www.deas. harvard.edu/~lois/SageCertMeeting2.01/>.

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