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Hands-On Optics: A Volunteer's Perspective

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Abstract
As the Hands-On Optics program moves into its second year, some observations from the Southern California first year effort are presented. Much has been accomplished, greater organization and more volunteers are still needed.

Summary
As an Optics Resource Agent (ORA) volunteer who has actively participated in the HOO program since the training in July 2004, the author provides a perspective from working with the HOO principles, trainers, staff, teachers and students. This perspective actually predates the July 2004 training and begins in 2003 with some HOO SPIE presentations aimed at disseminating information about the program and recruiting volunteers from the optics community.

Admittedly, in the beginning, during and after some of the initial information dissemination presentations, there was significant uncertainty about the program among prospective volunteers; at least in California. Some members of local OSA Chapters who have been doing educational outreach expressed concern that so much money would be spent on the HOO program, that it would leave little for the grassroots programs and actually take away momentum from those efforts.

As one of those volunteer educators, this presentation will share experiences that lay those fears to rest and encourage more optics professionals to volunteer through the HOO program. One of the best reasons for this encouragement is that the teachers and staff associated with the MESA programs are highly motivated and receptive to working with Optics Resource Agents. The ORA training is actually good and the materials are very useful; especially when you get to the classrooms where they are actually using the materials with the students. While the organization of HOO & MESA events varies from location to location, the author has experienced both a high degree of coordination and some where improvements will help.

In general, the author has not yet experienced a better way to reach more young people to teach them about optics and light than participating in the HOO program. Check it out!!

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