

# Technically speaking ...

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A publication of the STC@NC State

Vol. 1, No. 3

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## Mission

To introduce and orient incoming students, both graduate and undergraduate, to the field of technical communication, the Society for Technical Communication, and the professional writing and technical communication programs at NC State, and to provide academic and professional networking opportunities.

## Contact Information

### Student chapter website:

[http://www4.ncsu.edu/~brad\\_m/STC@NC-State/](http://www4.ncsu.edu/~brad_m/STC@NC-State/)

### Carolinas chapter website:

<http://www.stc-carolina.org>

### National STC website:

<http://www.stc-va.org>

## Congratulations!

Let's give our sincerest congratulations to the December graduates of the MS program:

Mitch Arnold

Kelly Horn

Karen Mobley

Sue Ann Pentecost

Jennifer Williams

Although we might be a little jealous of them, we wish them the best in their future endeavors.

## Welcome!

Let's also extend our warmest welcome to the newcomers to the MS program who are just beginning this semester:

Caroline Brooks, Dwayne Cornelison, Myra Day, Jennifer Hayden, Carl Nuckols, John Payne, Jeanne Ann Ramsey, Ann Roy, Meredith Schuessler, and Ying Xiao.



## STC@Tompkins

Instead of meeting at Bruegger's this month, we will meet in Tompkins to kick off the new semester. Because we want as many people as possible to come to the same meeting, we decided to hold only one meeting instead of the usual two. We'll meet in Tompkins, G126 on Thursday, January 11, 2001.

Come meet the newcomers to the program and greet old friends. Students and Technical Communication faculty are invited to attend. Refreshments will be provided.

**We invite you to celebrate the new semester with us on Thursday, January 11, from 5:00 to 6:00 in Tompkins G126.**

## Triangle Training: Opportunities for expanding your skills

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*This issue of Technically Speaking looks at ways students in the MS program at NC State have developed skills outside of their class experiences. The STC Carolinas chapter frequently offers great training opportunities at low cost and convenient times for our tight budgets and schedules.*

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Last semester I had the chance to attend the STC Carolinas chapter Saturday workshop. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to develop meeting and decision making skills.

As graduate students, we know that developing professional skills is important to our value as technical communicators, and we can only learn some of these skills through professional organizations, conferences and co-op's. But finding the time or money to participate in these functions is challenging. In spite of the field's demand for us to learn software tools, the cost of learning these programs can send the healthiest person into a cardiac arrest.

This particular workshop was a double feature that was divided into a morning and afternoon session conducted by Lynn Ann Bartholomew of Dallas Learning Lab Associates. She was a great speaker, especially at 8a.m. on a Saturday morning. Her use of a video scenario reinforced the learning experience, and she brought to light a large amount of information in what I would consider a small amount of time.

The workshop started with a lecture on *Escaping the Black Hole: Effective Meeting Skills*. Lynn discussed the increase in meetings among companies and how the desire to do more during these meetings is growing due to virtual office environments and new technology. But at times, these meetings can leave a person confused and bewildered because there is no purpose or organization to them.

As graduate students in technical communication, we are often reminded of the fact that we may have to prove our worth to a company or client in spite of our ability to communicate effectively through print and online media. Therefore, possessing effective meeting skills can give us the edge over co-workers from other departments.

The title of the afternoon session was *Creative Problem Solving: Based on the "Abilene Paradox" by Jerry Harvey.* This was a great session because Lynn not only lectured but also demonstrated the "Abilene Paradox" through her use of a video scenario. The Abilene Paradox occurs when individuals go along with the group and make unwanted decisions. The only way for members to avoid visiting the Abilene Paradox is by avoiding "groupthink." I enjoyed this session because at the time I was taking ENG 512, and we were discussing how "groupthink" played a factor in the failure of a museum project organized by various technical communicators.

We may have to prove our worth ... in spite of our ability to communicate effectively through print and online media.

However, Lynn suggested some creative alternatives to use when solving problems in a group:

- Active listening skills
- Conflict management
- Interpersonal communications
- Visioning and goal-setting
- Problem-solving techniques and methods

Professional skills building is not something we can learn easily in one course but is something that we must take upon ourselves as students. And although doing so on a Saturday may not appeal to most of us, this Saturday workshop allowed me to add worth to my work as a future technical communicator aside from learning new software tools.

– Tracy DesVignes, *STC@NC State provided the funds for Tracy to attend this workshop.*

Although the MS program at NC State does a good job of providing us with the background and core skills that we will need to be successful technical communicators, one of the biggest complaints that I often hear concerns the lack of opportunities to learn specific tools. How many of us have not heard that we must have RoboHELP, FrameMaker, or Dreamweaver listed on our resume to even get an interview? How many of us have not participated in an argument for foundational knowledge over tools knowledge? Although most of us come to this program with a good deal of computer knowledge, the MS degree's purpose is not specifically to teach us more tools. How, then, can we fill the gap?

How many of us have not heard that we must have RoboHELP, FrameMaker, or Dreamweaver listed on our resume to even get an interview?

Computer training is expensive, particularly in the programs many of us need to learn. There are some options available to get inexpensive training. One of the least advertised is the training available through the Learning Technology Service here at NC State. This service provides workshops and online training on such topics and tools as web design and, more specifically, Dreamweaver and Fireworks. The nicest thing about this training is that it is available free of charge to NC State faculty, staff, and graduate students. That's right – it's free! Check out the LTS website for more information: <http://lts.ncsu.edu> – it's definitely worth a look.

Another excellent resource is the STC Carolinas chapter. This chapter offers a number of great training opportunities at low cost to STC members. They also offer much of this training on Saturdays, because they know most members would be unable to attend during the week because of work or school conflicts.

I recently attended a FrameMaker training workshop that I found to be quite valuable. Kay Ethier, whose name you have heard if you have been to any of the Carolinas chapter events, led the workshop. She came prepared with an easy to follow training manual for each of the participants and showed us a number of extremely useful demonstrations. This was a great way to dive into FrameMaker and learn its major features and capabilities. Considering that I usually try to teach myself new software when I am facing a project deadline for one of my classes, this workshop was a great, stress-free learning experience.

Some other benefits of the workshop included the small class size, thirteen participants, and the low cost, \$125 for a full day of training for STC members. Also, these workshops are a great place to network with other technical communicators in the triangle.

Like Tracy mentioned, I found it difficult but rewarding to give up a Saturday to attend this workshop. I would encourage all of you to get the fullest benefits from your membership in the STC by attending these workshops, attending the STC conferences, and staying current with the chapter's activities. You never know where they might lead.

– Hope Chandler, 2<sup>nd</sup> year MS student



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## Upcoming STC Workshops

### FrameMaker QuickStart

What: Condensed, fast-paced hands-on introduction to Adobe FrameMaker 6.0. Suitable for technical writers and editors.

When: Saturday, January 27; 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Where: Bright Path Solutions

Who: Kay Ethier of Bright Path Solutions

Cost: \$125 for full day of training

Contact: Leatta Welch, 303-3377,  
leatta@mindspring. Com

### Web Dev 101

What: Comprehensive hands-on workshop where you'll actually create and post your own web pages.

When: Saturday, January 20; 9:30 a.m. 3:30 p.m.

Where: Productivity Point International (PPI)

Who: Bill Albing

Cost: \$55 for full day of training

Contact: Tim Roney, 250-1719, [tsroney@aol.com](mailto:tsroney@aol.com)

## Money talk

### The Rug Doctor Raffle!

Tickets are \$1 each or 12 for \$10.

The story behind the raffle. . . .

We have a Rug Doctor MIGHTY PRO carpet cleaning machine as a gift from the company because a group of students from Etta Barksdale's ENG 331 class suggested a number of helpful revisions to their manual. (Etta is a 1998 MS graduate!!!)

You can check out the machine at <http://rugdoctor.com/mightypr.htm>.

It is the MIGHTY PRO model on the left.

We will be holding the raffle for the RugDoctor later in the semester.

See an officer if you would like to purchase or sell tickets.



### Call for articles

Have an article idea for the newsletter? We welcome your thoughts and comments. Please give ideas or stories to Hope Chandler, the newsletter editor. You can put something in her box in the Tompkins computer lab or email her at [hechandl@unity.ncsu.edu](mailto:hechandl@unity.ncsu.edu). We look forward to hearing from you.

## Email updates

If you would like to receive updates about chapter activities before the next newsletter, please send an email our Membership Committee Manager, Rebecca Bessinger, at [rkbessin@unity.ncsu.edu](mailto:rkbessin@unity.ncsu.edu). She'll make sure that you get added to our listserv.

## Web speak

Our focus this month is on training opportunities in the Triangle. One of the best-kept secrets around is the Learning Technology Service here at NC State that offers free training to faculty, staff, and graduate students. Check out their site for available workshops and online courses:

<http://lts.ncsu.edu/>

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