

Technically speaking ...

STC

A publication of the STC@NC State

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Local 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.



STC Mission

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

Contact Information

Student chapter website:

http://www.ncsu.edu/stud_orgs/stc

Carolina chapter website:

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

International STC website:

<http://www.stc.org>

Orientation for Technical Communication Students

by: Sarah Egan

The STC@NC State's mission is to introduce and orient incoming students 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. To begin meeting the mission this year, the chapter started off the 2001-2002 school year by welcoming our new students to the Technical Communication program. Nine of the thirteen new MS Students were able to attend our orientation session on Thursday, August 16th.

Members of the Technical Communication faculty and current STC@NC State officers greeted the new students. The orientation session was brief and informal. After introductions, Dr. Stan Dicks spoke about advising and the different options available for meeting the requirements of the program. Dr. Susan Katz spoke briefly about the challenges and benefits of taking ENG 512 during the first semester of graduate study. To wrap up the session, Dr. Brad Mehlenbacher, Faculty Advisor to the STC@NC State, explained some of the benefits of joining the STC.

Some of our new students are NC State Alumni and did not need to hear the typical orientation information about parking, the library, and computer labs. While they enjoyed some refreshments with the faculty, the students new to NC State spent time with Sarah Egan, Faculty Chapter Coordinator, and Audrey Williams, Education Committee Manager, asking questions and finding out some of the basics of graduate studies at NC State.

The chapter hopes to continue to provide an orientation session for new students each semester. If you have ideas about content, or any suggestions on how to improve future orientation sessions, please let President Ann Roy know.

Welcome!

Let's extend our warmest welcome to the newcomers to the MS program.

Tracy Ammons, Ingrid Bailey, Tracy DesVignes, Chip Hartzog, Kathryn Hunt, Jason King, Dave Kmiec, Casey LoFrese, Ruben Moreno, Lars Nelson, Christina Reynolds, Ji-eun Suh, and John Wilson.



STC @ Brueggers

We are meeting this upcoming Wednesday, September 19, and Thursday, September 20. Please join us as we discuss ways the STC@NC State can contribute to relief efforts for New York City and Washington, D.C. We will also discuss plans for the remainder of the semester.

October Meetings will be held October 17 & 18. We look forward to seeing you at these important meetings.

Feature Articles

Orientation for Technical Communication Students

Report on the Spring 2001 STC Board of Directors Meeting

Technical Writing at Ericsson

ForeHelp vs. RoboHelp

President's Corner

Welcome back to school and to STC@NC State. I hope everyone had a great summer. We've got a lot of exciting things planned for this year. The STC officers met with our STC Regional Director-Sponsor, Chris Benz, during the summer for a strategic planning meeting – part of the minutes from that meeting are in this newsletter. They'll show you some of the wonderful ideas our leaders suggested to involve and educate our members. If you have more ideas on programs you would like to see our chapter do, or ways to increase membership, please let me or another officer know. The officers and their contact information are listed in this newsletter.

This issue is full of useful information for you. It has our meeting dates for STC@NC State and the STC Carolina Chapter, a summary of the graduate student orientation we held at the beginning of this school year, a report from our Director-Sponsor, and much more.

Again, welcome back to NC State and your STC chapter. I wish everyone a productive and educational year!

Ann Roy
President, STC@NC State

Editor's Column

by: Myra Day

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to and reviewed this newsletter. We have redesigned the newsletter to incorporate some new feature articles such as our "From the Trenches..." section, which will highlight the technical communication work experiences of different STC members. In addition to new topics, we have included some favorite sections from last year's newsletter, such as "Webspeak," which gives information about websites that focus on some aspect of technical communication.

We invite members to write articles especially for the "From the Trenches," "Review," and "Webspeak" sections. If you would like to submit an article, or other information you think should be published in the newsletter, please send it to me as a Word attachment. The deadline for the next newsletter is October 29.

Excerpts from the "Report on the Spring 2001 STC Board of Directors Meeting"

by Kitty Aughey, Region 1 Director-Sponsor
and Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor

One of the many roles of an STC Director-Sponsor (D-S) is to attend board of directors meetings three times a year. The board uses these meetings to discuss and vote on issues that affect our Society in both the short and long term, and to share other items of interest.

This year's spring meeting took place on 12 May in Chicago, Illinois, the day before the start of STC's 48th Annual Conference.

Chapter Awards

The high point of every spring board meeting is to review the applications for Chapter Achievement and Chapter Pacesetter awards, and acknowledge the award recipients for a job very well done. This year, Region 2 garnered four Chapter Achievement Awards and one Pacesetter Awards

Chapters of Merit: Vermont, Piedmont, Alberta,
North Carolina State University, New Mexico
Kachina, Kansas City, Snake River

Other Items of Interest

stc.org: On 1 April, 2001, the stc-va.org and stc.org Web sites were combined into stc.org, which is managed by the STC office. Approximately 4,000 people visit the site each day.

Online Registration: Online registrations are quickly becoming important to STC members. 40% of new members in the last year joined online, 23% of members renewed online, and about 40% of this year's conference attendees registered online.

Telephone Seminars: Since January 2001, STC conducted three telephone seminars.

Membership: STC membership continues to grow at a steady rate. On 31 March, membership peaked at 26,140. In the past 12 months, 6,116 new members joined the Society—the highest 12-month total ever.

As of 31 March, STC has 154 chapters—120 professional and 34 student.

The 48th Annual Conference was a huge success with approximately 425 speakers for 250 sessions. Nearly 2,400 people attended.

Editor's Note: The article also includes information about Board Actions, the Interim Executive Council Actions, and a list of all the Chapter Awards. To read the complete article, please visit http://www.stcregion.org/region2/chair_jun01.shtml.

From the Trenches...

Technical Writing at Ericsson

by: Tracy S. DesVignes

This summer I worked for Ericsson as a technical writer. I obtained the three-month contract position through T-P-S. T-P-S is a local contracting company that I located on the STC Carolina Chapter's website. It specializes in the placement of technical communicators.

After four weeks of eye-straining (and sometimes boring) database work, I joyfully attended my first product meeting with my manager to discuss the creation of a software user's guide. The first 30 minutes of the meeting was a blur since most of the discussion was about analog and digital frequencies and the use of various company-specific acronyms. The meeting, however, was a good learning experience because I was able to observe the relationship between technical writers, engineers, and project management in a real-world setting.

Although I spent a large amount of time working on the database, the opportunity to do some technical writing and editing was beneficial, and I walked away with a nice writing sample for my portfolio.

Review

ForeHelp vs. RoboHelp

by: Myra Day

Recently I had to do some comparative research about help authoring tools for my job. My manager had decided we needed to use a help authoring tool instead of Dreamweaver to create the help pages which are shipped with our software product. After a little research, we narrowed our choices to RoboHelp and ForeHelp.

I wanted to practice using both products, so I obtained demo copies of each. I was able to download a demo of ForeHelp from <http://www.sinterphase.com/fhdemo.htm>. I also ordered a demo cd of RoboHelp from <http://www.ehelp.com/products/robohelp/downloads.asp>. You can download RoboHelp from this site as well.

I was able to create sample help pages fairly easily after completing the tutorials provided by each product. My manager decided to purchase ForeHelp, mainly because of the price difference. RoboHelp Office 9 is priced at \$899, while ForeHelp is priced at \$437.

I compiled my research from many sites. Following are two sites I used to show my manager the differences and similarities between the two products:

- Lists strengths/weaknesses of RoboHelp and ForeHelp
<http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/robofore.html>.
- Compares the features of four help authoring tools:
<http://techwriting.about.com/library/weekly/aa091500.htm>.

Web speak

The following site offers a free online class in html. You can take a 10-lesson course at your own pace, and receive feedback as you design your own site. You can also receive a certificate of completion if you pass a skills test after completing all the lessons.

http://html.about.com/library/beginning/bl_htmlclass.htm

Workshops

The NC State Library offers workshops free to students and faculty through the Information Technologies Teaching Center (ITTC). The labs provide instruction in the latest software, hardware, and communications technologies. Visit the following site for more information: <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/administration/LRCDA/LRCDA.html>.

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Upcoming Events

Online Communication SIG Meetings - For complete details visit www.stc-carolina.org/www/PICs/online/OnEvent.shtml

- Wed. Sept. 19, 6:00-8:00 "What are JavaServer Pages"
- Wed. Oct. 17, 6:00 - 8:00 "Tivoli User Assistance: A Context-Sensitive, Embedded Help System Using JavaHelp and XML"

Technical Editing SIG: Meeting Information

- Sept. 20, 12:00 - 1:00 "Controlled-English Software"
- Oct. 18, 12:00 - 1:00 "Building a Editing Team through Mentoring"

For more information about these and other events, visit the Carolina Chapter calendar at <http://www.stc-carolina.org/calendar/index.shtml>

TRIDOC 2002

In April of 2002, a local STC chapter conference will be held in RTP. The conference is currently being planned and a Call for Proposals will be published soon. For details, visit <http://www.stc-carolina.org/conference/> and watch for updates in future newsletters.

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Reprint Policy

You may reprint original material from this newsletter as long as you acknowledge the author and the source.

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Chapter Meeting Report

July Meeting

On July 28, 2001, the STC@NC State officers, along with Faculty Advisor, Brad Mehlenbacher, and the Director Sponsor from Region 2, Chris Benz, held a Strategic Planning Meeting for the 2001-2002 school year. The group discussed the responsibilities of each officer, as well as activities and goals for the new year.

- Chris Benz presented the Chapter of Merit Award to Anna Weaver
- Sarah Egan explained the new theme for STC@NC State: Today's Innovations, Tomorrow's Traditions.

August Meeting

On August 22 & 23 the STC@NC State met at Bruegger's to welcome new members of the MS program and invite them to join STC. Ann Roy conducted a question and answer session about STC to explain the purpose and goals of the national STC and our local chapter. Attendees completed a survey to generate ideas about possible future STC programs to be offered at NC State. If you have ideas about programs we could offer, please contact Erica Bruce.

Note: The complete minutes are posted to the STC listserv after each meeting. Contact Rebecca Bessinger if you need information about the listserv.