

# 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](http://www.ncsu.edu/stud_orgs/stc)

**Carolina chapter website:**  
<http://www.stc-carolina.org>

**International STC website:**  
<http://www.stc.org>

## A Reflection on the Projects Class

by: *Loanna Overcash*

The projects course taught me how hard work creates strong friendships among the MS students. The best thing about the class is how it contributes to the camaraderie among all MS students. Besides the opportunity to see familiar faces, I think former students come to the defenses because each project is so interesting and unique that something can always be learned from them. The friendship and support that developed among the students in the course was especially meaningful to me. The class is designed so you constantly discuss your project with classmates. Their opinions were tremendously helpful, in addition to those from my advisors and the class instructor (in my case, Dr. Steve Katz, who did an excellent job of encouraging us and keeping us focused). Using the feedback provides a great opportunity to learn how to incorporate different perspectives into a project.

The class is also hard work. While I won't dwell on that aspect, I do have one suggestion for future students - try to choose your project before the class starts or have a good idea of what you want it to be. I suggest discussing options with the instructor or another professor. Once the projects class starts, you have to be prepared to propose your topic to the MS Faculty within the first few weeks of class.

Luckily, I knew what I wanted to do and had already put a great deal of thought into my project, which stemmed from my research project from another class. Otherwise, I'd have been held up in the proposal phase, which can put you behind from the start. So, use the time prior to class to decide what your project will be (and maybe have a back-up idea). You'll have to get it approved by the MS Faculty, but it helps to have some ideas and background research to support the need for the project.

While I'm very excited the hard work is finished, I will miss seeing everyone. I'm very sentimental about the whole experience - it was a rewarding way to finish.

## Student Updates

Congratulations to our December graduates!!!

John Balchunas, Rebecca Bessinger, Hope Chandler, Genie French, Margaret Heil, Ellen Lohr-Hinkel, Laura Houchens, Loanna Overcash, Mike Tormey, and Bridgette Wilson

Let's welcome the latest people accepted to the MS program.

Lorrie Barber, Wendy Bidwell, Chanel Chambers, Sonya Daniel-Jones, and Timothy Vancelette



## STC @ Brueggers

We will meet from 5:00-6:00 on Wednesday, February 20, and Thursday, February 21, 2002. This will be a program activity. The topic will be announced soon.

In March, join us on either Wednesday March 20 or Thursday, March 21 to cast your vote for next year's officers.

## Feature Articles

A Reflection on the Projects Class

The Chapter Volunteers

A Tale of Evolution

A Crash Course

## President's Corner

**H**appy New Year everyone! I hope you all had a wonderful break. It's good to see everyone again, even if it is in class.

Congrats to all who graduated last semester! Those of us still here have a full semester ahead. One of the important things we need to do is elect new officers. Elections will be in March with new folks taking the helm in May. The offices of President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, Web developer and Newsletter editor are the same, but the education, public relations, and program positions will be combined. This will streamline the executive committee, and while the duties of each office are important, they can be done by one person. If you are interested in an office, please see me or one of the other officers.

We also need to decide what to do for our community service project. The perfect project is one that benefits the community and is feasible for our busy members. If you have ideas for a project, please let me or Caroline Brooks know as soon as possible.

Again, welcome back and the best of luck to everyone for the semester.

Ann Roy  
President  
STC@NC State

## Editor's Column

*by: Myra Day*

**T**hanks to all who make my job easier with contributions and quick responses to my last minute requests and emails.

I would like to encourage members to submit articles without waiting for a request from me or the president. We appreciate the responses we have received from people we begged to write articles after yet another deadline has passed with no voluntary submissions. Unfortunately, we do not know everyone well enough to ask for last minute articles, so you may be missing a great opportunity to show off your writing skills and add to your resume.

To submit an article, or other information for the newsletter, please send it to me as a Word attachment. The deadline for the next newsletter is February 28.

## Excerpts from "The chapter volunteers (That's a verb!)"

*by Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor, and Mike Boyd, Senior Member, Carolina Chapter*

**W**ithout volunteers, most STC chapters would cease to exist. When it comes to volunteering, however, we encourage you to think outside the box, or outside the chapter, in this case. By "the chapter volunteers," we mean that your chapter becomes a catalyst for getting members involved in volunteer activities beyond STC, to other non-profit groups, individually or as a group, and thus volunteers as a chapter.

One way your chapter can do this is by gathering information about the professional skills the membership is able to offer to the outside world, and then publicizing that information to needy organizations. How? Here are some examples to get you thinking:

- Most non-profits need help with developing newsletters, news releases, and other print publications.
- Are you skilled in audiovisual work? One STC member, while on a trip with a church youth group, shot several hundred slides and more than 10 hours of videotape to document the experience for use in both internal and external church communications.
- Another member, experienced in instructional design, gave a seminar to church school teachers to help them improve their teaching skills.

As with any kind of volunteering, you of course receive some benefits, as does your chapter in some cases:

- You and your chapter receive recognition and gain new exposure in the community.
- You gain personal satisfaction by contributing to something that interests you personally, and your chapter gains the opportunity to promote itself to a new audience.
- You get to work with different content.

The list of benefits goes on, but remember the chief goal of volunteering should be plain and simple: It's about doing the right thing. Let's all do the right thing by giving back to the communities that have supported our personal and professional successes!

*Note: For complete Director-Sponsor articles by Chris, please visit <http://www.stcregion.org/region2/chair.shtml>.*

## From the Trenches...

### A Tale of Evolution

by: Carl Nuckols

This past year my career entered an evolutionary phase. Luckily it did not involve survival of the fittest, since I've not gotten around to working out like I'd planned to. No, this evolution was more a survival of the adaptable.

I was working as a technical writer in an IT department that produces data management software for clinical laboratory instrumentation. It was the most enjoyable job I'd had, and I seriously considered dropping out of the MS program. I felt overwhelmed after the birth of my second child in August, and I rationalized that I already had a job and didn't need to torture myself with extra work. I quickly began to enjoy my Fall classes, however, and decided to stay.

This decision proved fortuitous when my company was engulfed by a larger company. The new owners felt a technical writer in the IT department was no longer necessary. They did feel that a greater focus on requirements gathering, useful project documentation, and attention to human factors and usability was important. I was taking a course in usability and, like every good technical writer, I had a good understanding of the user. These factors helped me convince my boss that I was the perfect candidate for the position of Product Functionality Specialist. So the title sounds a bit bogus, but my Mom is impressed by my business card and I may enjoy this job even more than the last.

I have gained a greater appreciation for the MS program and the varied knowledge and experience it offers. My career opportunities now seem limitless, which is a great feeling when I once felt destined to forever perform mind-numbing tasks in a clinical lab.

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## Web speak

The following site offers links to information about many topics of interest to technical communicators <<http://www.soltys.ca/techcomm.html>> such as:

- Articles/Bibliographies
- Skills
- College programs

## Review

### A Crash Course: *Mastering the Requirements Process: A Review*

by: Myra Day

Last summer I worked as a technical communicator with a software development team. The team was revisiting requirements for a software product that had been developed and sent to three companies for beta testing. The group was small, and along with my other responsibilities of developing the online help system and writing installation manuals, I was assigned to help the engineering manager collect and document new requirements and changes to old requirements.

Well, I knew what requirements were, but I did not know much about the process of gathering requirements. Fortunately, the engineering manager gave me a book to read before we started. The book was *Mastering the Requirements Process* by James and Suzanne Robertson.

The book provided a detailed description of the steps based on the Volere process that are required to successfully gather and write beneficial requirements that will result in a successful product. The book defined terms relevant to requirements and emphasized the importance of involving the correct people early in the process. It also gave useful examples and aids, such as sample forms for gathering and tracking requirements.

The organization of the book, which uses a consistent example to go through the process stage-by-stage, is an excellent resource for people who are new to requirements gathering and those with experience. I learned enough from the book to be able to successfully participate in the process and to offer valid advice to the team members who had not read the book but had experience writing requirements.

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## Employment News

For tech writing workshops or training, check out these sites: <<http://www.travelthepath.com/training/techwriting.shtml>> <<http://www.scriptorium.com/training/schedule.html>> This is home of the infamous Techwr-l listserv along with a plethora of relevant tech writing info: <<http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/>> Also, this site has a ton of articles, job links, and basic information from an expert in the field. <<http://www.gary-conroy.com/>>

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## Upcoming Events

**Online Communication SIG Meetings** - For complete details, visit [www.stc-carolina.org/www/PICs/online/OnEvent.shtml](http://www.stc-carolina.org/www/PICs/online/OnEvent.shtml)

- Wed. Jan. 16, 6:00 - 8:00 "Online Learning"
- Wed. Feb 20, 6:00 - 8:00 "Tech Writers and Usability Design"
- March (date not known yet) "Online Help for Beginners"

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.

### STC Telephone Seminars

Beginning January 16th, two STC telephone seminars will be offered each month through March 2002. To register, or for more information, visit [www.stc.org/seminars.html](http://www.stc.org/seminars.html). You also may complete the registration form in the December 2001 Intercom.

### Technically Speaking..

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### Editor

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### Publication Policy

All submissions are welcome and should be sent to the editor as a Microsoft Word document.

### 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

### November Meeting

On November 29, the STC@NCState met at Bruegger's to discuss items about the Spring semester. The issues discussed were activities and programs and upcoming elections. Topics suggested for programs were 1) how to get published and 2) the job panel. A potential change in the STC@NC state offices was discussed. The proposed offices are: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Newsletter editor, Web Designer, and an Education/Program/PR position. No vote was held but the attending members showed their support for the proposed changes.

### December Meeting

No formal December Meeting was held, due to the Project Defenses. However, there was an end of the semester party at Mitch's on December 11 following the last night of project defenses.

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