

Technically speaking ...

STC

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Local Mission

Connecting Students to the
Future of Technical
Communication



STC Mission

Creating and supporting
a forum for
communities of practice
in the profession of
technical
communication

Contact Information

Student chapter

Web site:

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

Carolina chapter

Web site:

[http://www.stc-
carolina.org](http://www.stc-carolina.org)

International STC

Web site:

<http://www.stc.org>

Report from the 63rd Annual Conference of the American Medical Writers Association

by: Jennifer Bridgers

Last September, I attended the 63rd Annual Conference of the American Medical Writers Association in Miami, Florida. It was a phenomenal opportunity to "talk shop" with other medical writers and technical communication professionals. AMWA is an education-oriented organization, and its members seemed to embody this focus. As I talked to other attendees about their experiences, several topics that we cover in our M.S. classes were suddenly much more real.

While I was at the conference, I realized that there is a comfortable dichotomy within the organization: health scientists who are good communicators and communicators who specialize in the health sciences. Each group is important to the organization and contributes to their overall goal to "promote excellence in writing, editing, and producing printed and electronic biomedical communications."

The conference atmosphere was friendly and fun, offering a wide range of excellent workshops and open sessions. There were at least four open sessions each day and a wide variety of pre-registration workshops, such as Investigational New Drug Applications, Statistics for Medical Writers and Editors, and The Scope of Medical Communication. Attendees were limited to three workshops per conference, but three was plenty!

AMWA also offers two professional certificate programs: the Core Curriculum and the Advanced Curriculum. The Core Curriculum is designed to improve the skills of biomedical communicators. To earn a Core Curriculum Certificate, individuals must be enrolled in the Core Curriculum Program and must complete four required workshops and four elective workshops from a single specialty area. There are five specialty areas: Editing / Writing; Educators; Freelance; Pharmaceutical; and Public Relations/Advertising/Marketing.

The AMWA Advanced Curriculum is designed for those who have earned Core Curriculum Certificates or have a minimum of five years of experience in the specific field. Individuals must be enrolled in the Advanced Curriculum Program and must complete eight advanced workshops.

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Featured Articles

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Book Review: *The Essence of Technical Communication for Engineers: Writing, Presentation, and Meeting Skills* (*page 2*)

President's Corner

by: Maggie VanNorman

In September and October, STC members carried on a great NC State tradition – we met at Mitch's on Hillsborough Street after class. Mitch's is a fixture in student life at State for good reason; the dark wood and combination of cozy booths and long tables creates a convivial atmosphere that invites a settling in for food and drinks. Mitch's has such a cozy and genuine feel that a scene with Kevin Costner, Tim Robbins, and Susan Sarandon in *Bull Durham* was filmed there.

STC members, technical communication students, and their spouses, roommates, and friends met in the back room at Mitch's after Wednesday night classes and had a chance to get to know each other outside the classroom. Some alumni, such as Lars Nelson, our immediate past president, and Anna Weaver, a past president and our alumni-industry liaison, joined us for the evening. Some new students joined us as well and we hope they continue to be a part of STC. The dynamic between new people bringing fresh ideas and returning students continuing a tradition of excellence will keep NC State's STC chapter operating at the high level we have worked so hard to attain.

We all had such a great time that we've decided to make it a recurring event. The next time we meet at Mitch's will be Wednesday, February 4. The semester will be nearing the chaotic period and we will all probably need to unwind. It helps us feel like people with normal lives who do social things! Everyone is invited and please bring your significant others, friends, and other interested students.

Faculty Advisor's Note

by: Sarah Egan Warren

We are looking for new officers for 2004 - 2005. STC holds elections in April. New and returning students are encouraged to become leaders. If you are interested, please e-mail me at sarah@warrensweb.com

Book Review

by: Tracy Yeager

The Essence of Technical Communication for Engineers: Writing, Presentation, and Meeting Skills

Herbert L. Hirsch, 2000. IEEE Press, Piscataway, NJ

Hirsch's "little book" appears to be exactly what engineers overwhelmed in the technical aspect of their work need to deal with the arduous tasks of writing, presenting, and attending meetings. Hirsch's credentials - 30 years of experience in electrical engineering and his position as a senior consultant engineer at the University of Cincinnati - lend his book a great deal of credibility. Hirsch's book begins in a categorically devised way that would lead engineers to believe this book will help them. However, in his recommendations for success in writing, presenting, and interacting in meetings, Hirsch assumes that engineers have the freedom to disregard their co-workers' and managements' opinions and instructions with no real consequences. In other words, the book certainly does not lack valid points on paper; however, these points are far from being easily transferred from theory to practice.

Hirsch introduces three tools that he calls the "essence of communication" - connection, flow, and reinforcement - that can be applied towards three attributes - planning, attitude, and execution. These tools and attributes should be put to use in the three types of communication he discusses in this book - writing, presenting, and interaction (meetings). The book is divided into three parts, each one dedicated to one of the three types of communication.

Hirsch further organizes his book by discussing the three types of communication in order of the most controllable situation, the written document, to the least controllable situation, the meeting. Chapter One discusses planning to write a document. Chapter Two details how to acquire a healthy attitude in writing, drawing attention to mental tactics, such as eliminating all constraints. "...we can do anything we like. We can use railroad metaphors, cite passages from musicals, talk about big and little books, and basically just have a good time with the whole thing." Here is a crucial point of the book where Hirsch seemingly begins to ignore the fact that he is writing for professionals who have to adhere to structure in their companies and do not have the ability to write for the sake of a good time. In Chapter Three, Hirsch hails those who still use typewriters. He stresses simplicity and isolation when in the production stages of a document. *(continued on page 3)*

Conference (continued from page 1)

Individuals must be enrolled in the Advanced Curriculum Program and must complete eight advanced workshops.

The AMWA conference is also one of three times per year that the ELS Certification Exam is offered through the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences. The test is administered the day before the conference. (For more information on BELS, see Anna Weaver's article in the Fall 03 NCSU@STC newsletter.)

If you're interested in attending the 64th Annual Conference of the AMWA, it will be held in St. Louis, MO, from October 21-23, 2004. Registration opens in June. For more information, check out their national Web site at: www.amwa.org.

My advice is to register as early as possible and attend workshops on the first day or two while you're still sharp. Remember to visit the vendor area early – the choice freebies are limited - and, most importantly, sign up for the new member/mentor program to meet friendly people who are great sources of conference and professional insight.

Finally, if you are interested but want to hold off on attending the national conference, the AMWA Carolinas Regional Chapter is based in RTP and they host quarterly seminars. They will also sponsor a regional conference on May 7, 2004 at The Friday Center at UNC-CH. For more information, check out their Web site at: www.amwacarolinas.org.

Jennifer Bridgers is a graduate student at NC State University. She is in here last semester of the M.S. program in technical communication.

Editor's Column

by: Kathleen Angione

Greetings STC members and welcome back! I hope everyone had a restful winter break and that you are ready to take on the challenges of the new semester. Both STC@NC State and STC Carolina have some great events planned for the spring, so I hope all of you will attend!

Review (continued from page 2)

Part Two of the book covers presentations. In Chapter Four, Hirsch makes a solid point in saying presenters should focus on the audience and not on the topic. In Chapter Five, Hirsch presents the main difference between a readership and an audience – readers read because they want to learn something; audiences are at presentations many times against their own will. Thus, the two events have completely different types of audiences involved and should be planned for accordingly. Chapter Six describes delivering the presentation, pointing out that poise, confidence, and dignity are crucial elements.

Part Three deals with the meeting. He calls this situation “BOGSAT” – bunch of guys sitting around a table. Hirsch does not hide his opinion that meetings are a waste of time. He writes: “The key point regarding meetings is that most of them are useless, so more than anything else we need to be able to identify and avoid the useless ones, as I explain in this part of our little book.”

In Chapter Seven, the author highlights different types of meetings and their importance. Chapter Eight deals with acquiring the right attitude for a meeting, which he sums up by saying, “Mental preparation for a meeting is very similar to that for a presentation: we care a lot about the material, less about the participants, and very little about the outcomes.” Chapter Nine concludes the topic of meetings by focusing on participation.

Hirsch discusses the element of zero-planning in each chapter. Like most, Hirsch has a negative attitude towards such events. However, delivering goods in little time occurs often in many businesses and Hirsch ignores that. He rejects deadlines and assumes time constraints should not exist. He writes those requesting a service from someone, being any of the three types of communication he talks about in his book, on a tight deadline will “...get what they pay for...” and recommends to “....tell them to take a hike.” What he fails to acknowledge is that work is a reflection of the person who produces it and will be recognized in the workplace by co-workers and clients as such.

On paper, Hirsch presents useable methods regarding preparations of certain tasks. It is his recommendations in delivering and executing these goods where the weaknesses of this book stand out. Readers of this book will see that as he goes from discussing the most controllable situation to the least controllable situation, his ideas get more out of line with reality.

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Upcoming Events

SIG Meetings

For complete details, visit <http://www.stc-carolina.org/calendar/index.shtml>

Meets at Mitch's

Wednesday, February 4, 7:00p.m. -? Hosted by STC@NC State at Mitch's Tavern on Hillsborough Street. All are welcome, including significant others!

Best in Show International

Thursday, February 12, 6:00p.m. in Tompkins 126. Come see the online and publications winners of 2003! This is a joint program with the Carolina chapter.

Future of Technical Writing

Wednesday, February 18, 5:30-8p.m. Tour the EPA Visualization Lab! For more information, contact contact Ann-Marie Grissino (919).562.2464, (919).426.8515 (cell).

STC Conference in Baltimore, MD

May 9-12. For more information, visit:
<http://www.stc.org/conference.asp>

STC@Brueggers



The next meeting of STC@NC State will be held on February 11 & 12 from 5-6p.m. at Brueggers Bagel Bakery on Hillsborough Street. Please join us!

Congratulations to the December 2003 Graduates!

Technically Speaking is the newsletter of STC@NC State, which is published four times annually.

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