



Our Mission
Connecting students to
the future of technical
communication

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

We're here for you!
Check out our website at
[www.ncsu.edu/
stud_orgs/stc](http://www.ncsu.edu/stud_orgs/stc)

See what's going on with
the Carolina chapter:
www.stc-carolina.org

View the main governing
STC website:
www.stc.org

Contact us via snail mail:
NC State University
Student Chapter-STC
c/o Sarah Egan Warren
Box 8105
Raleigh, NC 27695-8105

Technically speaking...

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Welcome, and Welcome Back

— *STC board*

No more teachers, no more books... whoops! Just kidding! School's back in session, which means a crop of new technical communicators have entered the MS (and PhD!) program. New classes are being offered alongside old "favorites," and once again the Tompkins parking lot is filled with students fighting over spots before their 6pm classes. What a great thing it is to be in school!

All joking aside, it's actually a great time to be in technical communications. It's never been easier to become involved with the STC chapter on campus. More events and activities than

ever before are being planned and we need YOUR help. Do you want to lead an event? Do you want to give a lecture about the industry you're in? Or are you interested in simply sitting back and taking in all that STC has to offer?

There's so much! And being a member of a student chapter means you are at the focus of all chapter events. *You* get to decide. We hope you'll join us this year at a social, seminar, or gathering. Let's make this year the best year ever for STC@NC State! ✓



"Your personal contacts are going to get you a job. Build the best network of contacts you can."

— *Lars Nelson,
class of 2003*

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"The field of Technical Communication is so diverse, it might take you a while to find your niche. Don't be afraid to explore different avenues and when you find something you think you might be good at, jump in with both feet and learn more about it. Find a mentor, join an online community, look into professional societies, and get some books on the topic. In short, keep learning and growing; the M.S. program is just the beginning."
— Mir Haynes, class of 2000



Presidential Memo

— *E-Ching Lee*

Welcome, and welcome back. Everyone will see new faces this semester but soon, those faces will have names attached. Say hi and introduce yourselves. Most people do not bite.

The STC committee has planned a fun year for you. Check out the calendar in each issue of *Technically Speaking* and on our website. Get excited and involved. If you like chocolate and picnics and educational seminars and socials for a cause, we have something for you. If you like meeting with other

students over food and drinks, we have that too. If you want to help out in a bake sale, wave your apron. If you like something that your STC committee did not think of, tell us about it.

Get ready for the fall semester. There may be nights of writer's block and aching necks and frustrated efforts trying to make sense of the readings for class. Then again, there will be times when your thoughts and words come together, and your professors and classmates will challenge you to make that extra push to develop

yourself as a technical communicator.

An academic semester is a tide. You dangle your dry feet in the harmless waves of class introductions and syllabi that entice you into the sea. Next, you get sucked in by the current of assignments and threatened by the tidal waves of projects. Finally, you swim and swim and write yourself a safe passage to the shore. Before you know it, the tide is coming around again. Jump in. Summer is over and the water is great. ▼

Editor's Soapbox — Serial Killers

— *Heather Brautman*

Hello and welcome back to everyone reading this issue of *Technically Speaking*. I am thrilled to be your newsletter editor this year. Please drop me a line at heatherpez@excite.com and let me know what you think about the new format.

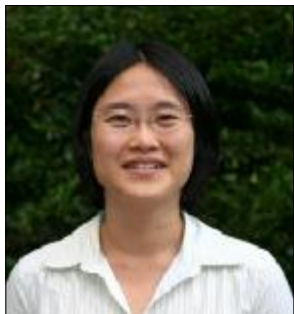
I thought this space might prove worthy of a few pixels' ranting. I am hoping that some of you may be in the same situation as I find myself in regularly.

I love commas. The Oxford comma to be specific. Do I hear any "Oh, yeahs!" from the crowd? Perhaps it was my NJ upbringing. The teachers there drilled into us about using the serial comma. (AKA: The Oxford comma) I like it, I love it, I use it, and I miss it when it's gone. (See how I snuck it in there?) To me, it's a non-issue. You use it because it separates three or more independent thoughts. (Note: I am in no way a professor and I am not encouraging you to come over to The Comma Side. Not really.)

Yet where I work, it's anti-Oxford city. That's a cold, dark place. (It's also a cold, dark, and sad place. And a cold, dark and sad place.)

So, I try to rebel by sneaking Oxfords into my writing when I can. I've found a few allies and we bond together over our respect for that third little squiggle. Do you feel the same? Let me know about your stealthy. Would you rather rant about something else? I'd love to hear it. Maybe it'll take my mind off frequent denial of my little friend. ▼

Meet the Board!



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Don't miss out on our picnic on Sept. 25!! Watch your mail for more information.

Chapter News:

Keep an eye on this spot each issue to be in the know about all the comings and goings of the STC@NC State chapter.

On June 16, the chapter board (those fine looking folks on this page) met to plan out what is shaping up to be a fantastic year for *you*, our membership! We have socials, educational seminars, and more just ahead. Board members present reflected on last year and shared their excitement for the coming school year. With the addition of students in our new PhD program, we have the potential to break all membership records. Membership head Will Flowers is going to be visiting *you* soon with an application in his hand— don't let him down!

Get your sweet tooth ready! One of the first events the board has planned for this year is Chocolate School. This family-friendly event will take place Sunday, August 28 at Lindt Chocolatiers in Crabtree Valley Mall, 3pm. For your \$10, you will receive a heavenly lecture on the making of chocolate (do your NCSU professors feed you in class? The ladies of Lindt will!), embark on a taste tour of the store, and receive a wonderful goodie bag to take home for when you crave more chocolate. This class is capped at 30 people so RSVP to heatherpez@excite.com today! Family and friends are welcome (children must be well-behaved and able to stand quietly for approximately 1.5 hours, no strollers).

Congratulations to Rachel Kight, departing editor of *Technically Speaking* and a recent graduate from the MS program. Rachel received the NCSU chapter's 2004 President's award and also earned the STC's awards of Excellence and Most Improved for her work on the newsletter. Way to go!

Congratulations are also in order for Michelle Kidd-Tackaberry, who will have an article published in *Technical Communication*, the journal of The Society for Technical Communication. Part 1 Michelle's article is included in this newsletter, so please give it a look! ▼

Defining Glossaries, Part I

— Michelle Kidd Tackaberry

INTRODUCTION

Technical documentation often employs terminology that would be unfamiliar to most nontechnical readers. During new product development, words and terms are created or re-created to describe and define new products and procedures. It falls upon the technical communicator to explain these new terms to a wide variety of audiences: marketing communicators, code developers, information designers, software testers, sales people, and of course, the new product user. To define new terms for nontechnical users, technical communicators can use glossaries to compile lists of specialized word definitions as a reference for users unfamiliar with the new terminology, while allowing technical users to use those same documents without interrupting their reading. These “mini-dictionaries,” found in many different places in documentation, are more than convenient help files. Just as dictionaries help define and situate language across generations, glossaries help define and situate language within technical documentation, and can aid communicators with important translation and localization efforts.

In this article, I provide a brief overview of the history of glossaries, explore the rhetorical technique of formal definition as the preferred method of writing glossary entries, and explain the guidelines for writing glossary definitions provided in technical writing textbooks.

THE HISTORY OF GLOSSARIES

Caruso (1986) defines a glossary as “a mini-dictionary located at the beginning or end of a technical document” (264). Glossaries pre-date dictionaries and are the first examples of definitions in written

texts. A dictionary is primarily a work for reference; it is “in the first place, a source of information that answers all kinds of questions from users on words” (van Sterkenberg 2003, 6). The first known glossaries were those of the Akkadians or Babylonians; from about 2600 BCE, these glossaries were written to make the Sumerian language accessible for its speakers. These early tablets took the form of thesauri, with words grouped together based on their meaning.

In all sorts of technical documentation, the kind of definition a technical communicator may employ will depend upon the needs of the reader, the complexity of the term to be defined, and the purpose of the communication.

Early glossaries in ancient Greece and China had similar thesauri structures. While we think of dictionaries today as lexicons of language, style, and meaning, the earliest examples of what became dictionaries were specialized lists that defined words found in certain texts. Religious forces were responsible for the creation of these word definition lists: these were specialized texts compiled for the benefit of religious students so that they could understand the texts with which they struggled.

In his brief history of dictionaries, van Sterkenberg explains that the word clerk derives from the Latin clericus, or clergyman; a clerk was a clergyman who spoke the vernacular and had to learn Latin and Greek to understand the religious texts he studied and “translated” for his illiterate audience in the pew. To assist clergymen, copyists began to write

explanations, sometimes but not always in the vernacular, for difficult passages in the Bible, the Qur’an, the writings of Confucius, and other religious texts. These “glosses” were found in the margins or between the lines of documents. They did not interrupt the original running text, so that an experienced user of the document could study it without being interrupted.

Glosses soon were grouped into collections published separately from the texts to which they referred. One of the most famous early glossaries, compiled by Reichenau in the 8th century, contained about a thousand difficult words from the Vulgate Bible translated into easier Latin or Romance language words. During the Middle Ages, larger monolingual dictionaries meant to instruct students in Latin and Greek were compiled. As education began to be more widely accepted during the 12th and 13th centuries, and was focused on the teaching of “useful things” (van Sterkenberg 2003, 10), a great demand arose for these kinds of tools to assist in the learning of grammar and vocabulary in the vernacular. Larger and larger lexicons were published, especially in German and Dutch.

Grammaticus published the first comprehensive English-Latin bilingual dictionary, called the *Promptorium parvulorum sive clericorum*, about 1440. During the 16th and 17th centuries, as both England and France made the writing of dictionaries of central importance in the preservation and dissemination of their languages, dictionaries became the large alphabetized word collections that we are familiar with today.

Today glossaries still serve the same function that they did for medieval monks struggling to understand St. Paul, Lao Tzu, or the Sahifa: they are lists of terms found in texts that make “key definitions available to nontechnical readers without interrupting technical readers” (Lannon 1997, 383). Glossaries may be found in front matter, back matter, and sidebars, or in the case of hypertext, may be linked to documents through keyword hyperlinks so that glossary definitions may be accessed by users if they so desire.

DEFINITION

As Zimmerman and Clark (1987) note, too often, we use technical and scientific terms without considering whether our audiences will use them in exactly the same way. If they do not, we lose ground in the struggle to communicate. (223) Sides (1999) defines rhetoric as that body of techniques “by which we explain our knowledge of a subject to an audience” (38). Defining and categorizing terms are important rhetorical techniques in technical writing situations that usually require a high degree of precision (White 1996). In the strictest sense, a definition does not concern a thing but rather a word or term that represents a thing. In a glossary, a definition also serves to limit that word or term by its usage in a specific rhetorical situation, such as a software user guide or an online help file. In all sorts of technical documentation, the kind of definition a technical communicator may employ will depend upon the needs of the reader, the complexity of the term to be defined, and the purpose of the communication.

For instance, the term “window” as used in a technical glossary may not refer to “an opening constructed in a wall or roof that functions to admit light or air to an enclosure,” but instead to that area of a computer screen that “displays its own file or message independently of the other areas of the screen” (American Heritage dictionary 2000, 1384).

Some technical writing handbooks and textbooks suggest formal lexical style for

definitions (see Hacker 1991, White 1996, Mills and Walter 1986, Sides 1999, and Whitburn 1999). Taking their cues from classic lexicography, which relies on Aristotelian rhetoric, these texts explain formal definitions in terms of three basic elements:

- The term to be defined (the species or definiendum)
- The general category of which the term is a part (the genus)
- The specific characteristics that distinguish the term from any other examples existing in the general category (the differentiae).

In formal definition, the three elements can be understood as a logically dictated formula, such that definition (species) = genus + differentia.

Glossary definition is a special variation of the rhetorical process of classification, in that it sets its subject, the term to-be-defined, in a rigidly limited scheme of classification. While in a dictionary we probably seek to make a definition a general statement that will be “applicable to all members of the class tagged by the word being defined,” (Brooks and Warren 1972, 85), a glossary definition seeks the narrowest class possible sufficient to define a term as it is used. Precision, or the tight identification of a species to a class, is the key here and the reason why the formal definition structure is described in technical writing textbooks as the preferred, or most common, method of definition for writers of glossaries (see Niedvlander and colleagues 1986, Mills and Walter 1986, and White 1996).

WRITING GLOSSARY DEFINITIONS

Making a glossary begins with understanding the reader’s needs. The best way to approach [the task of glossary making] is to read the manual again, asking yourself, “Would I (the reader) understand this word or phrase?” (Thirlway 1994, 77). According to the Random House guide to technical and scientific communication, a good definition “creates new meaning from known meaning” (Zimmerman and Clark 1997, 223). What Brooks and Warren call “the

Precision, or the tight identification of a species to a class, is the key here and the reason why the formal definition structure is described in technical writing textbooks as the preferred, or most common, method of definition for writers of glossaries.

principle of common ground” implies that a definition is not only “of some term, but is for somebody” (authors’ emphasis). A good definition works by reference to what the document’s audience already knows or “is willing to learn for the purpose at hand” (87).

A genus must be “familiar to the reader ... and neither too large nor too narrow” (Hacker 1991, 54) yet must “limit the meaning of the species and give as much information as possible” (Mills and Walter 1986, 86). Fear (1981) defines the purpose of classifying a term as “twofold: to give the reader a quick general notion, a starting place, and to cut down on the amount of detail it is necessary to present” (47). If a class is too broad, the reader will have difficulty separating the term from the other members of the class; if too narrow, the reader may not understand the term at all because he has no context in which to place it. ▼

This article will be published in its entirety (including a bibliography) in an upcoming issue of Technical Communication, the leading journal of the Society for Technical Communication. Publication of this article does not imply endorsement of a product or service by the STC. Further distribution of this article must be approved by its author and the editors of Technical Communication. We will also publish the second part of this article in the next issue of Technically Speaking.

"Make your class projects relate to your job. You'll get kudos from your boss, the assignment will have a relevant 'real-world' meaning to you, and you might be lucky enough to get paid for doing your homework."

— Mark Bright,
class of 2004

A Technical Editor in Profile

— Michelle Mebust

Elizabeth Stephens (a pseudonym) is a Senior Technical Editor for a 20-person environmental science research group at a local university. She holds a B.S. in biology and an M.S. in environmental management and became a technical editor after being laid off from an environmental consulting position.

Elizabeth enjoys modifying documents to enhance their organization and readability and bring them closer to perfection. She derives enormous satisfaction from creating documents that are "significantly better" than the draft documents she receives from her clients. Technical editing allows her to work "behind the scenes, as a stage manager," a role she prefers to that of "an actor in front of a formal group."

In addition to editing, Elizabeth coordinates proposal preparation for the

research scientists in her group, using her organizational skills and "hyper-attention" to detail to ensure projects meet deadlines.

Elizabeth supervises herself and her work comes under review only by the authors whose documents she edits.

Because of her science background, Elizabeth's clients view her skills and knowledge more positively than they otherwise might, trusting her judgment and using her services, even though they are not required to do so.

Elizabeth acknowledges the importance of mitigating a client's adverse reaction to a heavily edited document. She takes care to comment on the positive aspects of each document and, if she knows the author will appreciate humorous comments, she'll sprinkle a few throughout her edits to keep the tone light.

If Elizabeth anticipates a negative reaction to her edits, she'll deliver the edited manuscript in person so she can first discuss the edits with the author before handing over the altered manuscript. When editing by hand, she uses an ink color other than red (say, aqua or green), which many authors associate with "big, bad mistake."

When editing, Elizabeth does so from the perspective of a targeted audience member. She believes "one of the most valuable things a tech[nical] editor gives an author is a fresh pair of eyes," especially because authors become so immersed in their subject matter they lose perspective on the knowledge base of their audience.

Elizabeth equates the application of her editing skills to a document as "taking a lump of clay and turning it into a fully formed piece of pottery," a skill any creative person can appreciate. ✓

Speaker Feature

Timelytext[™]

Total technical and training content

Don't miss the upcoming presentation of *Interviewing to Get the Job* by Ronnie Duncan, president of Timely Text, Inc., one of North Carolina's largest placement agencies for technical writers. STC @ NCSU will host Ronnie's seminar, which has also

been presented to the Carolina STC technical editing chapter.

Ronnie will also be available to answer questions about seeking employment in this ever-competitive field and answer questions about employment possibilities in the Triangle area. Timely Text's website is located at www.timelytext.com.

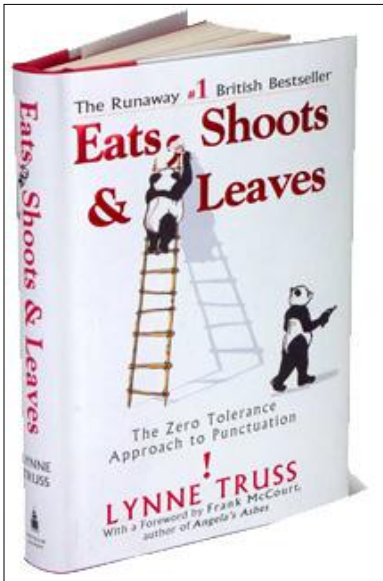
What: *Interviewing to Get the Job*

Who: Ronnie Duncan, president of Timely Text, Inc.

When: September 14, 5:30pm-7:00pm

Room TBA, please check the STC@NC State website.

Reader's Review



— Heather Brautman

The book *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* is already well ensconced in the halls of technical writing. It's been on multiple best seller lists, raved about in industries far and wide, and even is prominently displayed for sale at the STC national conference. Why all the fuss? Besides the fact that it makes grammar fun (yes, it's possible!), it really sends home a lot of the ideas that we technical writers struggle with every day. Mostly that we're often up against a strong wall of

defiance when it comes to dealing with SMEs, marketing, and other corporate folks who think things like commas, spelling, and other punctuation are simple throwaways. We know the truth— this stuff is important!

Author Lynne Truss spent many a year “rescuing” misaligned (or excluded) commas, semi-colons, and exclamation points from erroneous supermarket signs and movie posters. Although the bulk of her research is done in England (and therefore may need

certain tweakings for our “Americanisms”), much of her frustration and rantings are easily applied to we technical communicators.

Who hasn't been in a grocery store and wondered why the sign bragged about “Apple's today”? Or felt their hearts clutch up at a hardware store bragging that they “make keys”? In her comical book/novel/instruction manual, Truss guides us on the path to solidarity amongst “sticklers”, as she calls we folks who actually *like* grammar. ✓

SIG Spotlight— Technical Editing

One of the biggest benefits of joining the STC is the access to SIGs, Special Interest Groups. Various SIGs exist in the Carolina Chapter, our local chapter, which students are eligible to attend at no additional cost.

The Technical Editing SIG meets the fourth Thursday of each month in RTP at IBM and features a guest lecture/lunch

n' learn atmosphere. Previous topics include *Interviewing to Get the Job*, *Working with Non-English Speaking Technical Communicators*, and reviews of new industry tools. The group was previously led by Michelle Corbin, a 1996 graduate of the MS in Technical Communication program and is now run by Anne Tice, who has long been

active in the technical communication community.

Students are encouraged to get involved with SIGs to augment their school experience and network with other technical communicators in the field. For more information on local SIGs, check out www.stc-carolina.org. ✓

“An eye for detail is underrated. Slow down and pay attention to the details.”
— Meredith Blackwelder, class of 1998

Mail Call

Dear Technically Speaking...

Dear *Technically Speaking*,

I would really like to get involved with the STC, but I'm spread pretty thin with working full time, kids, the gym, schoolwork, my garden, etc. Something's gotta give. How do I prioritize? —*Busy*

Dear *Busy*,

Like most of the students in the MS

program, you certainly have a lot on your plate! Congratulations on being able to handle it all— it's something many people can't. I'd suggest baby steps. Why not attend one fun social outing planned by the STC? This way, you're getting a break from the schoolwork and you can check out what STC has to offer in a relaxed setting. Some events, like the upcoming Chocolate School, are things you can bring your family to!

Since you're already committed to bettering yourself by your education, it makes sense that you'd want to further your success by maintaining connections in the field. STC is a great way to do this. The board has planned many events throughout the coming year. Check out the calendar in the newsletter, and plan to attend something soon! ✓

Got a question?
Email heatherpez@excite.com

Where are They Now?

The MS in Tech Com program produces successful graduates every single year. Many are working in the field of technical communication, passing along the knowledge and skills obtained through the program. Are you a graduate or do you stay in touch with one? Please send updates (career, family, personal achievement)

✕ Michelle Corbin, class of 1996, is a Senior Technical Editor and Information Architect at IBM. Since graduation from the MS in Tech Com program, Michelle has been active in the Carolina chapter of the STC (serving in various positions including President) and has published articles used by students in our program today.

✕ Meredith Blackwelder, class of 1998, currently is employed as a Technical Publishing Specialist at SAS.

✕ Mir Haynes, class of 2000, is the owner of Anabo Studios (www.anabostudios.com).

✕ Lars Nelson, class of 2003, is a Technical Writer at Cisco. Since graduating from the MS in Tech Com program, Lars got married and is expecting a baby this November.

✕ Ann Roy, class of 2003, is a Staff Software Engineer at IBM.

✕ Mark Bright, class of 2004, is a technical writer at SAS. In February, Mark had an article, *Creating, Implementing, and Maintaining Corporate Style Guides in an Age of Technology in Technical Communication*.

✕ Chip Hartzog, class of 2004, is a Technical Writer in the Business and Industry Solutions Company at SAS.

✕ Rachel Kight, class of 2005, is a liaison between Site Communications and HR Departments at IBM. She works in the CCR (Corporate Community Relations) Department.

Wise Words

"Don't rush through it all; be sure to enjoy the ride. Engage in the intellectual process, research and write about issues that really interest you. Join the NCSU Student Chapter of STC, and get involved -- developing yourself professionally is your responsibility, and you will get so much more out of your experiences by being involved in the professional society."

— Michelle Corbin,
class of 1996

Wise Words

"You don't necessarily have to decide exactly what you want to do straight away. However, it is important to get yourself into a co-op or intern position early - you'll gain invaluable 'real-world' skills to couple with the MS degree, plus you'll have a clearer picture of where you want to go from there."

— Chip Hartzog, class of 2004

Employment Resource! Are you on the list?

To many students in the MS program (and alumni too!), one of our greatest privileges is Dr. Dicks' job email list. Did you know that certain employers in the area (big and small) post jobs *solely* to Dr. Dicks, who then sends them out to us? This means that you might be hunting on Monster, the N&O, and CareerBuilder, not even knowing of a great opportunity out there. In fact, some of these employers have such high esteem for NCSU Tech Com students that they specifically request them. If you're not on the mailing list or your email address has changed, send an email to Dr. Dicks at sdicks@ncsu.edu.

Fatten Up that CV Now

It's never too early to think about your CV. Or even just to practice your writing skills. Or be able to have something to send home to Mom to post on the fridge! Hone your writing chops early by writing for *Technically Speaking*. We need you! This newsletter can be as big as we want it to be, which means an endless opportunity for articles. If you've got ideas, please send them to us. We'd love to see you in print!

Send articles (or questions) to:
heatherpez@excite.com.

Stuck? Here are some topics we'd love to see an article on:

- You in the workplace (are you a lone writer? Part of a team? How's it going?)
- Tool/application recommendations/reviews (we can't know it all! So share your knowledge and gain that of others)
- Book reviews
- Course, seminar, and convention recaps

- General articles on the field of technical communication (maybe something you're submitting for a class... take it further and send it to us too!)

We'd also love to publish your personal successes. Did you just land a great new job? Finally get that journal article accepted? Started your own business? Let us know! To be included in the next issue, please send your work by September 15. Remember, this is your forum, so use it! ▼

A Look at Last Year

— Sarah Egan Warren, Faculty Advisor

A fresh new year starts as you read this newsletter. Although I look forward to working with the returning officers and new officers this year, I would like to share with you our "report card" for the student chapter for 2004-2005. This is in no way a criticism of any of the individual officers or of the STC as a society. Rather, I hope you see it as a plan for this year to repeat what we did well and improve on those items that we did not fully achieve last year.

Newsletter: A+

Our newsletter has been internationally recognized with awards of Merit in 2002, 2003, and 2004. This past year, we were honored with an award of Excellence and Most Improved. Thanks to everyone who contributed, especially Rachel Kight and Myra Day.

Website: C

Nice design, functional, and helpful... but out of date. Something we've already begin to work on it this year!

Membership Drives: D

Despite our best efforts, enthusiastic officers, and well-laid plans, membership drives were stalled because of the change in membership requirements for students. We worked

hard to let the STC know how important student members are and they listened! We're fired up for excellent drives this year.

Social Programs: B

We had some great informal social programs that allowed members, students, faculty, alumni, and significant others to socialize. We hope for more programs like these as well as larger attendance this year.

Transformation Information from the Society: A

Website information, a blog, email contacts, and a Board that listens and responds to feedback make this difficult process a little easier. For more information, see <http://www.stc.org/transformation/>

Communication: B

Messages forwarded to the ETC and STC listservs as well as to faculty are our main method of communication. In addition, newsletters are placed in the mailboxes in the 113 computer lab four times a year. This year, we're making the newsletter available in .PDF format so everyone can receive it via email or paper— it's your choice!

TRIDOC: A

Members and current students assisted

at and attended the Carolina Chapter's TRIDOC conference in April. This local conference was an excellent opportunity for networking and learning new skills. We already have great plans to partner more with the Carolina Chapter this year.

Educational Programs: D

Although we had a helpful session on registering for Spring 2005 classes, we did not provide as many educational opportunities as we had intended.

Expressing Concerns and New Ideas: A

Our chapter was instrumental in petitioning the STC Board to reverse their decision about student membership. We surveyed members through the STC listserv which was valuable when we made our case to the Board to about the student membership requirements.

These grades give us an average overall grade of C+ which I think is a fair assessment of what we accomplished last year. I am proud of the work that the officers were able to accomplish in this difficult transitional year and look forward to working with the returning and new officers this year. ▼

Seattle, It's Not Just Starbucks

— *E-Ching Lee and Heather Brautman*

Every year, the Society for Technical Communication holds its national conference at various destinations across the country. The 2005 conference, held in Seattle, had approximately 1600 technical communicators immersing themselves in the theme of “Experiencing Technical Communication.”

The value of attending the conference may differ for each attendee, but there's a few reasons why students should consider making the trip:

- **Further learning:** See techniques and situations from our textbooks come alive through practical workshops and lessons from those “in the field”.
- **Networking:** Going to school may seem rather insular, especially if you're not out in the working world yet, or not in the field of tech com. Going to a conference puts you directly in the path of hundreds (if not thousands) of fellow technical communicators. Get to know them. They may offer you your next job!
- **Variety:** For many of us, a courseload consists of one or two classes per semester. In the span of a few days, you can take classes in writing and editing, usability, management, consulting, and more.

Two NCSU chapter board members, E-Ching Lee and Heather Brautman, attended the conference. Heather, who was attending her second annual

conference, took classes mostly in the writing and editing track, such as *Highlighting Hazards* and *Editing Tips & Tricks*. “It's always beneficial to go to the conferences,” said Heather. “They reinforce your connection to the community and keep you informed of new ways you can keep your work fresh.”

E-Ching attended a large variety of sessions that covered a range of interests. She went to Felice Frankel's Honorary Fellow presentation on scientific photography, sat in on Leah Guren's *Ten Commandments of Technical Communication* based on a recommendation by Sarah Egan Warren, and attended a talk on resume, cover letter, and interview blunders by a Walt Disney World hiring manager. Unfortunately, she did not manage to win any of the Eeyore prizes for the Disney trivia contest. “I don't know Dumbo's real name,” E-Ching protested.

Attending a conference isn't only about the classes. The STC sets up a large “bookstore”— selling many helpful tomes on topics pertinent to technical writing (at this year's conference, E-Ching and Heather spotted Joann Hackos' book previously used in ENG 518).

You can meet textbook authors and view STC award winners' work. A resource area allows vendors to set up booths and lets attendees recruit translators and sample the latest software offerings (this past year, translation and single sourcing

companies were the most prevalent).

And of course, there's the travel. Although the STC Carolina chapter recently held a local conference, the national conference isn't slated to be held in Raleigh anytime soon. (Next year's conference will be held in Las Vegas.) So inevitably, you'll not only be immersing yourself in technical communication, but doing it in a place where you can do some sightseeing as well. E-Ching spent time visiting Seattle's famed Pike Place Market and Heather paid a visit to the Science Fiction Museum/Hall of Fame and took an underground city tour. There's always time for non-technical communication learning built in.

The STC even provides resources to help you plead your case to your employer. Other STC members can also offer information on how they were able to get their trip approved. Consider making plans to attend Las Vegas now! ✓



Heather Brautman and E-Ching Lee take a break from the STC conference in Seattle.

Profiles in Professorship

In each issue of *Technically Speaking*, we will feature a profile of one of the distinguished professors of the MS in Technical Communication program. In this issue, we profile Dr. Susan Katz.

— Heather Brautman



Dr. Susan Katz

Students in the MS in Tech Com program would be hard pressed to graduate without taking a class taught by Dr. Susan Katz. Some have come to our program by moving up through undergraduate levels of the English department, where Dr. Katz teaches ENG350 (Internships in English). All Masters candidates must take ENG512 (Research and Theory in Professional Communication), a course Dr. Katz teaches often (including this semester). It's her favorite class to teach.

"ENG512 is my 'comfort' course. I've taught it many times, and I change it a little bit each time, but I enjoy introducing students to the literature of our field and learning from their responses," says Katz.

Dr. Katz is also one of the regular participants in the "capstone" class most Masters candidates take their last semester at NCSU, ENG675.

"ENG675 is a challenging course, but it's also extremely rewarding to help students see a major project through from the beginning to end as they demonstrate what they have learned in the program." For those students planning to take ENG675 this coming Spring, Dr. Katz will serve as one of the members of the advisory board.

Throughout her time at NCSU, Dr. Katz has seen many new technical communicators "born" at NCSU and is able to offer some valuable advice to newcomers: "Talk to other students to find out about courses in other departments and to learn details about required and elective courses in our department.

Participate actively in all your courses so that you get to know your professors and your classmates better."

Dr. Katz also encourages students to take advantage of all that STC has to offer. "Get involved with STC now, while it's less expensive, to expand your network and take advantage of workshops and conferences."

To those preparing to leave the hallowed halls of NCSU, Dr. Katz offers this advice: "Stay in touch with faculty and classmates so you can use the network you've created while in school. Expand that network by maintaining your affiliation with STC. Offer to come back and talk to new and current students in orientation or relevant courses. Continue to learn new techniques, new programs, and new applications and continue reading

about research and trends in the field so that you can develop your career."

Although firmly entrenched in her career at NCSU, Dr. Katz also makes time for non-tech related activities.

After nine years of a long-distance relationship, she enjoys staying close to home now that her fiancé Paul Organ has finally become a citizen of North Carolina. They like to watch television ("Lost," "House," and

"Desperate Housewives" are this year's top choices), rent movies, and try different restaurants (Lemon Grass, a Thai restaurant in North Raleigh, is the current favorite).

Dr. Katz keeps the Wolfpack tradition close to home by spending time with daughter Dr. Jessica Jameson of the NCSU Communication Department and her family (son-in-law Brian and eight-year-old grandson Peyton).

For students who may need a break from their text books (who could imagine?), Dr. Katz recommends *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell (nonfiction), *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* by Mark Haddon, and *Emma Who Saved My Life* by our department's very own Wilton Barnhardt. ▼

"Get involved with STC now, while it's less expensive, and expand your network."

— Dr. Susan Katz

The Back Page Bulletin

Calendar at a Glance:

August

- 15- Orientation
- 25- Happy Hour at Sammy's
- 28- Chocolate School

September

- 14- *Interviewing to Get the Job*
- 25- Picnic

October

- State Fair

November

- 12- Chapter Challenge!
- 29/30- Bake Sale

January

- 12- Happy Hour at Playmakers
- Content Management seminar

February

- Chinese New Year party
- Bylaws review

March

- Renaissance Festival
- Final Four Party
- Charity Walk

April

- Science Olympiad service event
- ENG 675 defenses
- New officer elections

Message From STC National President Suzanna Laurent

It is my sad duty to inform the members of STC that our Executive Director Peter Herbst has resigned his position, effective on October 7, 2005. Pete has been a member of our professional staff for over 21 years, and Executive Director since 2003. He has been a dedicated and trusted representative of STC during his career, and we will miss him very much. At the same time, we wish him the best in his future endeavors.

As your president, I am working with the Board of Directors to craft a transition plan and to select Peter's successor. It may take some time to identify and retain the best person for the job, but we will strive to do just that. The Board is assisting me in designing the transition for STC in a manner that will continue the Transformation process that we have undertaken during the past two years, and which is still a work in progress.

Please join me and the Board in thanking Peter for his contributions to STC during his tenure here, and in supporting the professional staff that remain. For them, the uncertainty will be stressful, but we all know that we have a professional staff that is knowledgeable, efficient, and dedicated to STC. They deserve our support during this transition.

I will keep you informed as the transition plans evolve. If you have questions or comments, you may contact me at slaurent@prodigy.net.

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full color!

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