A new year settles in upon us. Consider how lucky we are compared to our neighbors up north—at least we’re not skiing to school!

For many students, the ringing in of a new year simply means a change in the class schedule. Some are starting the last of their classes here at NCSU. Many are already in the workforce, some are starting to put out feelers.

Whether you’re new to the program or soon-to-be-alumni, consider the fresh start of the year to be your time to become involved with STC. Inside, you’ll find information on many new events we’re planning. This is your chapter. You can decide its future. How many times in your life will you be able to have such a significant effect on something?

Consider adding “join STC” or “become more involved with STC” to your list of 2006 resolutions. After all, it’s easier (and more fun!) than slogging to the gym each day or eating more green vegetables.

After all, there’s never been a recorded case of eating more broccoli helping someone get a job.
Presidential Memo

— E-Ching Lee

Happy 2006 and welcome to a new semester. I hope every one had a good holiday season.

What do you want to do this semester? The STC has a list of activities to keep you connected with students and faculty in the program. Join us for our January 12 Happy Hour at Playmakers on Hillsborough Street. On January 19, join us again for an Introduction to LAMP (Linux/Apache/MySQL/PHP). We are also going to reschedule our Backpack vs. Briefcase event with the Carolina STC for some time this semester.

If there is some activity you feel the STC would enjoy (or should repeat), contact one of the officers with your suggestions. We are always looking for ideas from you. In fact, if you are so inclined, perhaps you might want to plan a take-over. The STC will have its elections in April and, if you are interested in getting involved, let one of the officers know. If you have your eye on one of our positions, come and talk to us. We welcome the interest.

One more reminder: Have you renewed your STC membership? Contact Will Flowers (will.flowers@gmail.com) for the paperwork and signatures if you have not.

Have a good spring semester.

Editor’s Soapbox – Smooth Criminal

— Heather Brautman

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so most of this column is going to be devoted to simply gazing upon this photograph, envisioning those “smoothie’s” in all their neon glory, just like I do, every Tuesday and Thursday evening as I head home from my class. I like to think it’s ironic that this erroneous sign is placed directly across the street from the NCSU building that houses the English (and Technical Communication) dept. I see many, many students each day come to class clutching their Planet Smoothies (not Smoothie’s). And as far as I know, the name of the place is Planet Smoothie. It’s a franchise, not a place owned by a guy named Smoothie, which would account for the apostrophe, such as “Joe’s Grill.” A place called “Smoothie’s” sounds more like a pick-up joint than a place to procure your evening’s healthful classroom rocket fuel.
Mentoring is a Two-Way Street

Andy Smith and Bill Albing

A good mentor relationship can be a boost of professional development for the participant and the mentor alike, and should be a necessary part of those involved in this dynamic profession.

When Andy Smith was looking for direction when considering a career adjustment, he contacted the mentor program at the local STC Carolina chapter and was put in touch with Bill Albing, who had volunteered to serve as a mentor. Andy was interested in learning more about technical writing and met with Bill to get his input on some basic questions:

- Was technical writing a good fit for his skills?
- How does one make a transition from the current job and skill set to a new one?
- What is the general outlook on the profession?

Bill had an engineering background and over a dozen years of experience as a technical writer. He gave advice on the need for good communications skills in a technical workforce, the emergence of XML as a trend of separating content from presentation, and gave a generally positive outlook for this changing profession. This discussion also gave Andy an idea of creating an XML resource center to help fellow professionals with less exposure to XML break into the technology. Bill recognized that not everyone that likes to write grows into a good technical writer, but Andy seemed genuinely interested in becoming more of a technical communicator than his current job allowed.

Since many of us come into the profession from other disciplines and backgrounds, Bill tried his best to encourage Andy without promising that a new job would solve all Andy's concerns. Andy relates his work with Bill:

“Bill gave great input about technical writing and helped me decide to move into the field. We have continued to work together now that I have entered the field. Bill has given excellent advice on how to develop my skills as a technical writer and has challenged me to give back to the professional community in the area. He has been very generous with his time and ideas, and he is a big part of the reason I have made the move into this career path. I work for a major manufacturer now in a group that is using cutting-edge publishing technologies and it really feels right.”

As they worked together on the XML resource center, sometimes only by exchanging ideas over email, and sometimes meeting for lunch to discuss jobs and career choices, Andy learned about XML and gained a lot of confidence in his choice of career direction, and Bill learned a lot about some emerging technologies and his own sense of where our profession is heading. Though it’s difficult to apply abstract labels like technical writing or technical communication or content engineering to capture all that we do professionally, it is more tangible to talk with a fellow professional, and this is the value of a mentoring relationship.

In a profession that does not have clear discipline boundaries or built-in mentorships with professors and internships, though admittedly there are a few programs in some universities, most professionals in technical communication depend on fellow professionals as mentors. Whether you join a mentorship program, such as the one offered by STC Carolina Chapter, or whether you relate with a fellow professional in an informal way either being mentored or mentoring, the role of more experienced professionals in the career development of beginning professionals should not be underestimated. And the benefit works in both directions, and is essential to the continuing growth of our profession as we share our insights with the next generation.

Andy Smith and Bill Albing are members of the STC Carolina Chapter. This article appeared on the following website: http://keycontent.org/tiki-index.php?page=Professional+Mentors. Andy Smith now serves as the mentor coordinator for the STC Carolina Chapter and welcomes student inquiries. Contact him at mentors@stc-carolina.org.

STC @ NCSU members John Martin (left), E-Ching Lee (middle), and Michelle Mebust (second from right) join friends and family members for a fun Caribbean night at Bahama Breeze on November 12.
“But then I don’t really see the appeal of blogs either. Why would I want to read the uninformed rantings of these people?”

This comment was made in a discussion forum that I follow, and as someone who was blogging when blogging wasn’t cool,” I immediately had to jump into the fray on the topic.

Blogs are here to stay, they have rhetorical value as a communications tool, and you might just be asked to write one as a technical communicator!

What They Do

Blogs do a number of things, one of which is to provide a depth of understanding. I’ve given two examples of what I mean by that already – links to other information that may or may not be needed by the reader in order to initially understand (e.g., “dogging”), or to augment their understanding of (e.g., the George Jones song allusion), an idea.

What They Mean to Technical Communicators

Quite simply, new job opportunities! The Turner Broadcasting Division of CNN is looking for a “Blog Producer,” to “cover web-logs (blogs), pod-casts, and other Internet-based forms of new media.”

I made my first blog entry on September 2, 2002, and have been blogging ever since. In the remaining four months of 2002, I missed 4 days. In 2003, I missed about 20 days during the year, and took off the entire month of December. In 2004 and to-date this year, I’ve not missed a day.

Blogging gives me the opportunity to exercise my creative juices, which I can rarely do in producing highly technical information in a big corporation. The fact that our publications generally get translated into at least 8 languages precludes
Go Get ‘Em!

I invite each of you to investigate the “blogosphere” yourself. It could hold your future as a technical communicator! My recommendation is just to “jump in” by starting your own blog. My personal blog is on www.livejournal.com. I am able to create more interesting visual blog entries with LiveJournal, as it recognizes most HTML tags, which I know how to code with LiveJournal, as it recognizes most HTML tags, which I know how to code manually. For very basic blogging, primarily with text and links only, www.blogspot.com seems to be a good starting point. Of course, LiveJournal allows very basic entry creation as well.

Happy blogging! 

John Martin is an NCSU Tech Comm student and software engineer at IBM. His current assignment focuses on organization-wide process compliance assurance, and when the business demands it, developing information for complex system security products. His personal blog, which at times contains adult content, can be found at http://dailyaffirmation.livejournal.com. The opinions expressed there do not represent IBM in any way.

The STC board would like to wish those students embarking on ENG 675 Best of luck!

What Can STC Do For You?

1. **Intercom**: Intercom, the Society's award-winning magazine, provides practical examples and applications of technical communication. Intercom also includes Society news, columns edited by technical communication experts, and a calendar of industry-related events.

2. **Technical Communication**: Technical Communication, the Society’s award-winning journal, publishes articles about the practical application of technical communication theory and serves as a common arena for discussion by practitioners. It focuses on both quantitative and qualitative research while showcasing the work of some of the field’s most noteworthy writers.

3. **Chapter Activities**: STC has more than 140 local chapters around the world. Regularly scheduled chapter meetings allow technical communicators to exchange ideas with peers and participate in practical, job-related programs. Most chapters also publish monthly newsletters and some sponsor local competitions.

4. **STC Annual Conference**: STC’s annual conference is the world’s largest gathering of technical communicators. Among the many highlights of the conference are educational sessions, workshops, vendor exhibits, and displays of the winning entries of the Society’s international competitions. Technical communication professionals also benefit from numerous networking opportunities and employment resources.

5. **Competitions**: STC organizes a variety of competitions to recognize excellence in technical communication. Different competitions focus on printed documentation, technical art, technical videos, and online communication. STC also holds writing competitions for students of technical communication.

6. **Special Interest Groups**: STC special interest groups (SIGs) are made up of members who share common interests or specializations within the field of technical communication. There are more than two dozen Society-level SIGs, including those devoted to indexing, information design, online communication, and marketing communication. SIG activities include publishing newsletters, developing articles for Society publications, conducting surveys, and presenting seminars.

7. **Web Information**: The STC office web site (www.stc-va.org) offers information about STC services, as well as a number of files and forms useful to STC members and chapter leaders.

8. **Jobs Database**: Technical communicators looking for their next job can go to the STC office web site, select “Jobs Database,” and search through hundreds of job openings according to geography and salary range.

9. **STC Technical Communicator Salary Survey**: This annual supplement to Intercom contains salary information from technical writers and editors. The information is broken down according to gender, education level, employment level, age, years of experience, and geographical area of professionals. This survey includes information from members of the United States and Canada.

10. **Networking**: STC activities provide excellent networking opportunities. You may hear about your next job at a chapter meeting or meet your next coworker at the STC annual conference. In addition, writing for Intercom, Technical Communication, or an STC chapter newsletter is an excellent way to raise your profile within the profession.

— This article was adapted from “10 Reasons to Join STC,” a pamphlet created by the STC.
Judy McCain (a pseudonym) is a Technical Editor/Technical Writer with an organizational communication group at a local non-profit research institution. Her six years of experience includes corporate marketing writing, publications coordination, editing, and content building for Web sites. Judy currently works on project/client communication, marketing materials, organizational communication, and scientific communication. Judy holds a B.A. degree in German, with a Russian minor, as well as an MS degree in technical communication.

Judy decided to become a technical communicator when she realized her German degree was not leading to a satisfying career. Assessing her skills and interests, she discovered that not only did she excel in writing and language classes, but she enjoyed them. Judy knew that the technical communication field offered many opportunities and, although she knew of other technical communicators who entered the field “by the backdoor” (i.e., with degrees in areas other than technical communication), Judy decided she wanted an MS in Technical Communication for the “credentials.” She’s now glad she made that decision as she uses the knowledge she obtained in graduate school to establish credibility, defend decisions, and persuade others to use her design choices. Judy believes her advanced degree garners more respect from her clients, who view her as having a “valuable skill set.” While in school Judy was surprised and pleased to learn that career opportunities in technical communication are not limited to software documentation. She was also surprised to learn that most technical communicators aren’t well-versed in the field’s theoretical underpinnings. Judy considers the theory she learned in graduate school to be “instrumental” to her success at work. Although she doesn’t make “rock star wages,” Judy enjoys her job and looks forward to going to work, a quality of life she greatly values.

Judy’s job duties require about 60% writing and 40% editing, although at the beginning she edited 100% of the time. During that time, she accepted any writing task she could (even working overtime without pay) to establish herself and gradually bring about the shift in her job duties to their current state. Currently, Judy writes and edits documents in four different areas: (1) project/client communications, in which Judy works on reports, proposals, slide presentations and (rarely) letters; (2) marketing materials, such as brochures, capability fliers, external press releases, and content for external Web sites; (3) organizational communications, where Judy helps develop policy documents, communication plans, corporate style and use guides, letters, memos, newsletter articles, Web site content and presentations; and (4) scientific communications, such as journal articles and posters.

Judy spends much of her time on such process management tasks as communicating with clients, assigning project responsibilities, and coordinating the services of project team members (e.g., graphics designers, document preparers, etc.). She oversees layout development, adherence to schedule milestones, and the assignment of expert services. Most of Judy’s clients express positive reactions towards her work. In Judy’s words, “Clients are happy to have the help and [they] recognize that I bring a necessary skill to the process and can improve their documents.” Judy also spends a lot of time formatting documents-in-progress to aid client understanding, even though this formatting won’t be carried through to the final document. For example, in documents whose content will eventually become Web pages, Judy underlines and changes to blue all the text that will eventually become hyperlinks.

A stressful aspect of Judy’s job is working with people who don’t approach communication tasks in the same manner she does. This conflict mainly occurs with graphic designers, who tend to be very nonchalant about deadlines. Judy mitigates some of the tension by touching base frequently with project members, especially the graphic designers who usually don’t think to alert others to problems they encounter. Another difficulty arises when certain clients make document design decisions based on their own preferences, as opposed to what the users need and what purpose the document tries to achieve. A final irritation is the occasional lack of respect she receives from others. Since most people write during the course of their workday, they often (mistakenly) assume that they know how to do Judy’s job, in effect devaluing her knowledge and skills.

Judy most enjoys taking various source materials, extracting relevant information, synthesizing it and creating a wholly new document. For example, she’ll first receive a proposal boilerplate and a strategic plan, then she’ll meet with a company vice president or a committee and then she’ll create a program brochure. Judy also enjoys interacting and consulting with clients on what medium choice and deliverable type will best suit their users’ needs. ❖
STC Scholarships Available

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate students pursuing careers in technical communication.

Four awards of $1,500 each will be granted for academic year 2006-2007. Application deadline is February 15, 2006.

Background
The Society for Technical Communication is a professional organization for people developing technical information through such occupations as technical writing, editing, graphical design, interface design, and Web design. These scholarships are for students who are studying for a degree in one of these areas.

Purpose
To assist students who are pursuing established degree programs in some aspect of technical communication.

Are You Eligible?
Applicants must have completed at least one year of post-secondary education.

Applicants must be full-time students. They may be either graduate students working toward a Master's or Doctor's degree, or undergraduate students working toward a Bachelor's degree.

Students should have at least one full year of academic work remaining to complete their degree programs, although under exceptional circumstances an award may be granted to a student for the final half-year.

Students should be studying communication of information about technical subjects. Other majors, such as general journalism, electronic communication engineering, computer programming, creative writing, or entertainment, are not eligible.

Applicants will be notified by mail of committee decisions by April 15.

To obtain application forms and additional information, contact:

Society for Technical Communication
Attn: Scholarships
901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
(703) 522-4114
www.stc.org

Congratulations to Heather Brautman, who was selected as the STC Carolina Chapter's Volunteer of the Quarter for Oct-Dec 2005. Heather was chosen for her efforts working for the Carolina Chapter. She received a certificate and was featured in an article in the Carolina Communiqué. It is the first time an NCSU student has been selected for this honor.

Board members have been busy meeting and planning fun and education activities next year. The Madrigals dinner was a success and Caribbean theme social with the Carolina Chapter at Bahama Breeze was a hit. Check the calendar on the back page of the newsletter for information on what is coming up for 2006!

Chapter News

Pictured here at the Taj Mahal in India is Sam Van Norman, husband of Maggie Van Norman, a graduate of the MS in Tech Comm program.

Thirsty? Mark your calendar for the “back to school” happy hour January 12 at Playmakers, right down the road from class. Join classmates, friends, and family for a relaxed evening of socializing.
ENG 675 Preview

— Heather Brautman

With the spring semester just capped off, a fresh crop of students have begun the journey known as English 675. This year’s class is the biggest yet and is taught by Dr. Steven Katz. Dr. Katz also was the instructor of Spring 2005’s class and has taught ENG 675 more times than any other Technical Communication faculty (this will be his fifth time teaching it). In fact, as the Director of the MS Program from 1995-1998, he led the creation of ENG 675 after years of tech comm students pursuing academic theses, some of whom never managed to matriculate out of the program.

“The MS program had the second lowest graduation rate in the entire university. Students were falling into a pit,” said Katz. “They might work on their thesis for five years while holding down a job.” With the replacement of the thesis with what is known as the capstone class, several students abandoned their theses and came back to attend the first 675 class, where they were able to finish a semester-long project. “The academic thesis was not serving the majority of our students, who were not going on for a Ph.D.” said Katz. “Now, in ENG 675, students have the option of writing an article intended for publication, but they can do work-related projects as well, which the majority of MS students elect to do.”

The format for the current 675 class, along with the revision of the MS curriculum, was shaped with a little help from industry. For example, both NCSU and technical communication experts in the field advocated the importance of keeping the oral defenses. While developing ENG 675, the tech comm faculty surveyed and consulted with leaders in the technical communication industry. Experts in the field insisted on retaining the oral defenses (previously a key part of the thesis process). They felt that having experience presenting their ideas and defending their research would serve students well in the “real world.”

The folks at NCSU had other reasons for wanting to keep the oral defense of projects. They wanted to ensure 675 maintained the intellectual rigor of the thesis process; but they also wanted to make sure that the degree retained the “MS” designation: “The Graduate School let us keep our title of Master of Science in Technical Communication because of the oral defense, as well as the intellectual demands of the course,” says Katz. “Without the project defenses, we would at that time have had to change the degree to a Master of Arts in Technical Communication, or even simply a Master of Technical Communication.”

Those students who have taken ENG 515 with Drs. Steve Katz or Carolyn Miller know the rhetorical value attached to anything science in our culture, including credentials.

Because he’s seen students through so many versions of the class, Dr. Katz has some advice for this year’s group. “Be aware that the MS faculty expects a sufficient amount of work to qualify the project as a 675 project, and work of sufficient quality as well,” he says. “Sometimes the work proposed by a student is not enough, sometimes it’s far too much for one semester and needs to be broken into pieces and or further focused.” Dr. Katz will be there to help the students with that work, as will two advisors per student. These advisors stem mostly from the MS faculty not on leave, but due to the large class size, other affiliated faculty members may be invited to assist. “A lot of people are interested in what we are doing,” says Katz.

“Time management is the biggest thing in this course.”
— Dr. Steven Katz

Most students in 675 will have already taken ENG 515, which should serve as good prep. The presentations and research performed in that class will help students write the argument of the prospectus and present outlines, first and second drafts, and then defend the final product, which will be due to faculty advisors a week before the student’s own scheduled defense date. “It’s a tight deadline,” says Katz. When asked how students can best maximize their “plan of attack” for 675, Katz mentioned time management.

“Time management is the biggest issue in this course. Yes, the project is a lot of work, and often entails conducting new research or learning new skills, and it will be a tight squeeze, but with a lot of effort and hard work students should be able to and usually do meet all the goals with flying colors.”

There’s good news and bad news. The good news is that no one has ever failed an ENG 675 defense. The professors really do want us to succeed with our projects, which is why they become so involved in them. However, if the MS faculty feel that a student (or his/her project) is not ready, the student is not allowed to defend the project—that is the bad news—and this happens almost every semester of 675. A few semesters ago, a “drop dead date” was instituted (based on when the student is scheduled to defend), at which time the decision is made one way or another. “It’s the most humane way possible,” says Katz. “We don’t want to
Matrix Resources Co.

— Heather Brautman

While attending an STC meeting in October, I met a representative from Matrix Resources Company, one of the local job-placement services in our area. With many agencies to choose from, how do you know who will best serve your needs as a technical communicator seeking (sometimes the very first) employment?

Matrix Resources, in Morrisville, focuses on all kinds of IT-related positions. Mike Brittain of Matrix says, “That could mean anything from technical writing to software/web development, help desk, even Director level.”

Although their company does not specialize in the placement of technical communicators, it’s always a good idea to keep your options open. “We’ve filled a technical writing position about every other month this year,” he says.

So how can you be one of those satisfied job recipients? Keep track of the trends. “We’ve seen more Java, .NET development and even project management positions,” says Brittain.

For those new to the field, Brittain recommends getting some trial work experience before applying for that full-time job. “Try and find an internship to participate in if at all possible with a local company in the field of interest. I would also recommend targeting companies within your field of interest for part time and summer/seasonal jobs. That’s always a good way to get your foot in the door.”

For those who do get to sign on with Matrix as a contractor, the benefits abound including medical, dental, vision, and life insurance.

Matrix was recently voted #4 on the list of Technical Staffing Companies in the Triangle area by the Triangle Business Journal. They were also #17 on the list of Top 20 U.S. IT Staffing Firms by IT Services Business Report/Staffing Industry Analysts (June 2005).

Consider putting Matrix Resources on your work plan. Contact them through the following channels:

Mike Brittain
Matrix Resources, Inc
Direct Line: (919)-653-1503
or 1+(800)-444-0965 x 1503
Fax: (919)-653-1550
www.MatrixResources.com

More socializing at Bahama Breeze, from left: Cindy Richardson-Decker, membership coordinator for the STC Carolina chapter; Terry Decker; Anjela Dukes, President of the STC Carolina Chapter; John Martin; Heather Brautman; E-Ching Lee
Get on (the) Board!

Although spring semester has just begun, it’s never too early to consider the future of STC @ NCSU. If you’ve been active in chapter activities and enjoyed yourself so far, why not consider becoming a more integral part of the chapter next year? If there’s something you felt didn’t sit right or you would have liked to see more of, take a board position and make it so next year.

Becoming an STC board member gives you the opportunity to get your foot in the door of a growing organization. It’s not only fodder for your resume, but also makes you that much more visible in the field. You can attend special board member meetings at the international conference. Serve as a mentor or leader for new students to the program.

Choosing to serve as a board member while in school also sets you up for future success and possibilities as a Chapter-level officer elsewhere. The experience you get now may help you achieve that board position after graduation.

All STC @ NCSU board positions are becoming available as of May. If you’re interested, contact the officer holding that position now. They’ll be able to help you with any questions you may have about their job responsibilities. It’ll also help us judge the interest levels when it comes to election time. Also feel free to contact our chapter advisor, Sarah Egan Warren, at sarah@warrensweb.com.

President: As President, you will lead the chapter’s efforts to grow. You’ll be at the forefront of NCSU students’ connections to the technical communication world outside of the university environment, encouraging other board members in event planning and work in partnership with other STC chapters. Interested in this position? Contact E-Ching Lee at e-ching.lee@yahoo.com.

Vice President: The VP is responsible for updating and maintaining the chapter website, which may entail enhancing or changing the website design itself. The VP must frequently update the information on the website and is responsible for updating and maintaining all website files on behalf of the chapter. Interested in this position? Contact Michelle Kidd-Tackaberry at mktaackabery@gmail.com.

Secretary: The secretary’s main responsibility is to take notes during STC @ NCSU meetings and then make those notes available to the group in a timely manner. Meetings consist of one planning/organization meeting during the summer and several monthly meetings throughout the school year. Additional responsibilities include helping the other officers organize and run STC @ NCSU functions, programs, and events. Interested in this position? Contact Michelle Mebust at michelle.mebust@verizon.net.

Treasurer: The STC@NCSU treasurer maintains the chapter’s financial records. He/she is responsible for the chapter’s bank account, including writing checks for chapter expenses and making sure expenditures are within the chapter’s means. Interested in this position? Contact Landra Hester at ljcunnin@ncsu.edu.

Newsletter Editor: The editor’s tasks include planning and scheduling the issues, writing/editing/proofreading articles, encouraging submissions from students, and keeping track of timely industry-related information. The newsletter, although required to conform to multiple STC standards, is left in the hands of the editor to design. This gives each editor the exciting potential to put his/her spin on the year’s layout, design, format, size, and more. Interested in this position? Contact Heather Brautman at heatherpez@excite.com.

Membership Coordinator: The membership coordinator is responsible for recruiting new members and managing the current roster of student STC members. Duties include updating the STC mailing list and sending applications and dues to the STC office. Interested in this position? Contact Will Flowers at will.flowers@gmail.com.

Treasurer’s Report

This year, the chapter’s financial records got a makeover. The amount of information being stored was growing quickly and was exceeding the boundaries of our organizational system. Also, it was becoming unclear where to file items and where to find them later. Consequently, my first project of the year was organizing our information. While deciding how to organize the material, I decided to implement a storage solution that was conducive to our chapter’s needs. The new accordion file folder system allows for quick scanning to file and find items. Hopefully the new system will be useful to treasurers in years to come.

We try to work efficiently on a small budget. So far this year, our expenses have been minimal, including orientation expenses and supply costs for the treasurer record reorganization. We are prepared for the financial requirements of our spring semester programs.

Also, don’t forget about our NCSU Tech Comm t-shirts! We still have shirts available for students, family, and friends. See a chapter officer if you are interested.
Profiles in Professorship

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

— Michelle Mebust

Dr. Jason Swarts

Dr. Swarts received his Ph.D. in Communication and Rhetoric in 2002 from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (incidentally, the same doctoral program that gave us Drs. Susan Katz, Steven Katz, and Carolyn Miller). His dissertation, *Textual Replay Mediation of Writing Reviews: Developing Technology to Afford Enculturation*, focused on writing review practices and how information technology enhances these practices. In Dr. Swarts’ own words:

> Specifically, I studied the “mediating” effects of technologies used to support writing review. By “mediation” I am referring to the way that a technology structures and clarifies our actions. A common example is a checklist, a simple technology that mediates grocery shopping by keeping an updateable record of the items purchased and left to be purchased. I studied the mediating effects of pen & paper versus a type of textual technology that I was calling a “textual replay,” a short recording of a writer’s onscreen writing activity (screen captures taken at a rate of 3 per second and spliced together as a movie of writing activity). I wanted to know if pen & paper or textual replay would change the conduct of writing reviews, making it easier for reviewers to share their experiential understanding of good writing. And I found some evidence of this.

Anyone wishing to know more about this line of research will soon be able to read about it in Dr. Swarts’ new book, *Together with Technology: Writing Review, Enculturation, and Technological Mediation*, currently under review at Baywood Press.

Dr. Swarts began teaching at NCSU in 2002 and his teaching portfolio includes CRD 703 Communication in Networked Society; ENG 508 Usability Studies for Technical Communication; ENG 519 Online Information Design and Evaluation; and, in Fall 2006, ENG 512 Theory and Research in Professional Writing.

Because CRD 703 is a new course this year, I asked Dr. Swarts for a brief description of the class. He says it covers a wide range of topics, beginning with the science of information networks and how these networks pertain to communication, moving on to the “people, places, and technologies that constitute networks,” and then considering the “politics, cultures, identities, and powers’ influencing network development.

In his hours away from teaching and conducting research, Dr. Swarts enjoys reading, cooking, and playing racquetball, although he good-naturedly admits to being skilled at only the first two. His current favorite book is Kobo Abe’s *The Ruined Map*, but he also enjoys books written by Annie Dillard, Don DeLillo, Bruno Latour, and Richard Russo. His list of favorite movies includes *Rushmore*, *The Ice Storm*, and *Persona* and his current musical interests run towards St. Etienne, Autolux, The Glands, and Shonen Knife.

Finally, in response to my request, Dr. Swarts offers this advice to incoming graduate students: “Don’t hesitate to like an idea for its own sake.”

— Dr. Jason Swarts

“Don’t hesitate to like an idea for its own sake.”

— Dr. Jason Swarts

In response to that message to those who assign the homework.
Chapter Officers

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Faculty Advisor – Stan Dicks
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Message From STC National President
Suzanna Laurent

2006 will be a memorable year for STC—don't miss it!

STC is committed to bringing you the best speakers, writers, scholars, and practitioners in the technical communication field—whether at one of our conferences, through our web-telephone seminars or other interactive initiatives, or in the pages of Intercom and Technical Communication.

• Membership (optional) in STC chapters and special interest groups
• Discounted registrations for STC conferences, programs, and seminars
• Access to STC’s annual salary survey
• Job searches via STC’s online Career Center
• Access to the members-only section of STC’s Web site

But that isn’t all. The STC community is growing, and we anticipate that 2006 will be a memorable and exciting year for us all. Among the new initiatives and events you can look forward to are:

• STC online forums. The new STC forums, which debuted in November on the STC web site, will connect members who have similar professional interests. Whether you use the forums to ask questions or discuss your latest project, you’ll receive instant access to other knowledgeable professionals.
• Exciting new educational opportunities. STC’s Training Program, held earlier this month, received rave reviews from attendees: 95 percent of respondents on the post-event survey said they would attend a future training program. In 2006, we plan to offer even more opportunities for affordable, hands-on training.
• STC’s 53rd Annual Conference. The largest annual gathering for technical communicators will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, May 7-10. No other conference for technical communicators can match STC’s for variety, affordability, and practical value.

If you have questions or comments, you may contact me at slaurent@prodigy.net.

The Back Page

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Calendar at a Glance:

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 673 defenses
New officer elections

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