For Dr. Brent Faber, the newest faculty member in the technical communication master’s program at NC State University, there’s no such thing as “small talk.”

“I’m always thinking as a linguist,” explains Dr. Faber. “I’m always taking note of language.”

Dr. Faber, a Canadian new to the American South, has noticed many differences in culture and the use of language while living and working in the Triangle.

Sometimes the differences are dramatic, sometimes much more subtle. Either way, he finds the use of spoken and written language in public discourse fascinating.

For example, he and his family shop for most of their groceries at a nearby Harris Teeter and Food Lion. “I’ve noticed there are differences, but I haven’t figured them out yet.”

At Food Lion, he says, cashiers and baggers will tend to make small talk by asking him about his grocery choices: “Is this variety of apple sweet or tart? Is this brand of cereal any good?”

But at Harris Teeter, check-out employees instead offer “confirmation statements”: “That cereal is really good.”

“‘I can’t underststate the role language plays as a formative force,’ he says. “It builds teams and organizations. It teaches us how social groups change. It’s what enables change to get a foothold.”

“‘There’s no way to do it without the right language…. Dr. Faber suspects the differences are tied to the kind of customers each store attracts. Customers at Harris Teeter tend to be “upper middle class,” while few customers “dress up to go to Food Lion.”

Dr. Faber’s specialty is in discourse analysis and organizational communications, the written and spoken discourse that happens in the workplace and in various organizations.

“How does language form an organization,” he asks, and by the same token, how does the organization form language? Language especially comes into play as an organization undergoes some sort of dynamic change – a new policy or a change in mission, for example.
The President’s Pen

Up and coming for STC @ NC State

By John Martin

Our student community has had a busy two months working hard to bring you programs and events that enhance your experience in pursuit of your educational goals here at NC State.

We’ve got a newly-designed home page (see the web address on page 1), thanks to Jen Riehle, who’s put in a lot of time and effort not only to redesign the site, but also to keep it up-to-date for us. Thanks, Jen!

And thanks to John Strange for the first edition of our newsletter, and for the one that’s in your hands right now! Thanks, John.

I’d like to thank Sarah Egan Warren, our fantastic faculty advisor, and all of the officers who’ve already worked on the New Student Orientation for beginning students in the MS in Technical Communication program, and two Faculty Meet & Greets. Thanks to the professors who participated in the Meet & Greets, too: Dr. Jason Swarts, Dr. Stan Dicks, Dr. Carolyn Miller, and Dr. Susan Katz.

In August, our Co-President, Andrew Armstrong, organized our participation in Service NC State. Andrew, thank you for that. And thank you to those of you who joined us in such a worthwhile community service endeavor!

In September, Michelle Tackabery, our membership manager, organized our participation in the Student Organization Fair Membership drive on the Brickyard. Thank you, Michelle.

Our plans for the rest of the semester include a PhD Panel Discussion, where we’ll have a group of folks talk about pertinent PhD programs here at NC State, and the general considerations in deciding to, or whether to, pursue such a degree. Christin Phelps is working with Dr. Carolyn Miller on this event. Thank you Christin and Dr. Miller.

Also in the works are a couple of joint programs with the STC-Carolina Community, our local professional STC community. The Cluster Progression Program brings professionals who are working in the six concentration areas (clusters) of the MS in Tech Comm program, to talk to us about a “day in the life” of their jobs, and then take questions from students.

In the spirit of “giving back,” we hope to follow that up with a “Back to School” program as one of the STC-Carolina’s events, where three or four students will talk about their reasons for returning to school to pursue an advanced degree, and then take questions from the professionals about what it’s like, in most cases, to be both working and back in school.

Finally, we plan to have another one of our popular Student/Faculty Roundtables, where students and faculty, get together, usually at a coffeehouse or similar venue, and talk about a topic of interest in Technical Communication. We’re aiming for November with that event, and then hoping to close the semester with an “End-of-Semester...”

Continued, page 5
By Brian Swiger

One of the more understated benefits of being a member of the Society for Technical Communication is receiving high-quality, award-winning publications each month. *Intercom*, the monthly online publication from STC, is chockfull of useful articles with pragmatic solutions to problems technical communicators face on the job and in the classroom.

For instance, I do some technical training in my current position and I’ve often wondered how to translate workplace training into a classroom setting. The first issue of *Intercom* online that I received had an excellent article on the topic — “Adapting Your Technical Training Style to the College Classroom,” by Lisa Earl.

“Teaching in both the academic and the professional environments presents opportunities for technical communicators to share their skills,” she writes. Earl, like most of the writers featured in Intercom, is an STC member who shares her real-world knowledge with those facing similar circumstances on the job.

When filling out an STC membership form, you will notice a section devoted to Special Interest Groups (SIGs). The SIG categories run the gamut of technical communication specializations, such as AccessAbility, Management, Technical Editing, Marketing Communication, and Usability, to name a few. You will realize from the context of the form that you are checking off areas that interest you as a technical communicator. What you probably won’t realize is that each of these SIGs has its own online publication that will appear in your inbox days after joining STC.

Since I work in education policy, I have found the Policies and Procedures (P&P) SIG online

*Continued, page 7*

By Andrew Armstrong

On a sweltering Friday afternoon in August, members of the STC-student community and other students in the MS program took part in Service NC State, a two-day annual event which brings together NC State students, faculty, and people from the local community to prepare packaged meals that are sent to people in need all over the world.

Throughout the weekend, participants packaged a total of 301,752 meals, which were sent to earthquake survivors in Peru and school children in Haiti, surpassing the original goal of 300,000 meals.

Our job was to unload trucks filled with bags of dehydrated food and set up the assembly line in Carmichael Gym where the meals were packaged by other volunteers the following day.

Tierza Watts, associate director for NC State’s Center for Student Leadership, Ethics, and Public Service and chief organizer of Service NC State, is very happy about this accomplishment and hopes to do even more next year.

“It was a phenomenal success, and we couldn’t have done it without out volunteers. We’re already planning for next year, and we’re even involving other universities. Our goal for next is to package 1 million meals."

*Continued, page 5*
Key content: How to develop a personal tagline

By Bill Albing

Part of professional development involves recognizing your strengths and learning how to express it to others. It is a helpful exercise to develop a tagline for yourself, in the same way that professionals in a previous generation were encouraged to develop a mission statement.

With shortening attention spans, today’s professional needs only a few-word tagline to fit in the sound bite of management’s smaller time slots. Beyond what Chris Benz would call shameless self-promotion, having a personal tagline keeps your career development focused and on track.

A Few Good Mentions
Just as a product has a tagline, a few words summarizing the product, just as a press release has a summary phrase or sentence, so each of us can develop a tagline for ourselves and use it on our personal Web sites or blogs, as a signature in our email. It serves as a branding slogan to help promote our abilities and to clearly state our expertise or specialization in our professional endeavors. But even if we do not publish it, it can serve as a reminder to ourselves and reinforce our decisions with regard to the work we do.

As an example of a company tagline, I like the one for Keane, “We get I.T. done” because it summarizes their ability to complete Information Technology department projects and the phrase is catchy and easily remembered. “We get it done” is almost like the popular “Get ‘er done” or David Allen’s trademarked “Getting Things Done” (GTD) method.

As an example of a personal tagline, one of my favorites is Michael Harvey’s “Driving Clarity.” Though he has not (yet) published anything with that tagline, I think that is his personal motto and one that he should use as a moniker for anything he does professionally. That two-word summary is at the heart of what he has done professionally and what he will do in his effort to re-invent the North Carolina STC chapter and re-invent his career, unafraid of the rate of change all around him. It is a tagline that will do him well. As with technical communication, I think a personal tagline should be succinct and accurate, concise and clear.

Getting the Message Out
Getting your tagline out for others to see is the next step in the process. Having a tagline is great, but the market needs to know you are there. While I recommend starting a blog as an easy way to make your appearance on stage, on the Web, many of us have more elaborate portfolios of online work. But having a tagline in prominent places on our Web site or blog allows others to find us more readily using search engines, which is a rudimentary form of networking that managers and other professionals are beginning to use. Whether you have your own blog or Web site, or whether you post professional information LinkedIn or Facebook (it’s not just for students any more), posting your tagline is easy and gives you a starting point for communicating who you are.

Going with Your Gut
As you develop and communicate your personal tagline, do not be afraid to do something different or slightly off the beaten track. Look at Ceil Hall locally who is determined to start a podcasting business; look at Tom Johnson in SunCoast chapter of STC who already has a great podcast called Tech Writer Voices. As they develop professionally along new lines of online communication, a personal tagline will help them with getting the word out. They are charting new territory and they are not alone.

Farewell to Armchairs
Well, I am not done with my own tagline yet, but it will have something to do with the flow of information (not just content but the exchange of content in the business context), which I see as the essential part of our profession and a part in which I play an important role. For now, my work is posted on KeyContent.org, and our tagline for that site is “Unlocking Communication.” I am, like all of us, a work in progress.

Job market
Employment opportunity information for MS in Technical Communication students is disseminated through the etc listserv, maintained by Dr. Stan Dicks. You’ll hear about hiring positions at the likes of IBM and SAS, as well as those at NCSU and other smaller companies in the Triangle area.

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How I became a technical communicator

By Simon Bate

I didn’t grow up to be an Information Developer (or a Publishing Tools specialist, for that matter). I wanted to be a number of things, but always got turned on by computers and programming.

Unfortunately I went to college during the dim time when there was no such thing as an undergraduate computer science major. After thrashing around as a math major in upper-division computer science classes (and not doing well, to boot), I took a light semester. I took a course in Geology, a course in Economics, and a course in Science Fiction writing with Joanna Russ.

I vowed that I would major in the course in which I got an A. Perhaps I had the system sussed out at last.

I got an A+ in Geology. My path was set.

That same spring, I applied for a summer job at IBM. Because I hadn’t settled on a major, I said I was an English major. After working for two weeks as a builder’s go-fer I got a call from IBM. I was told I would be interviewing for two jobs: driving a forklift on the loading bay and working in a publications department (they noticed my major). They asked, if both managers liked me, which job would I prefer? The choice was obvious, but my path now had a fork in it.

Once I started in the publications team, my ability to write and my knowledge of computers fit perfectly. I was asked back for a second summer. The summer after that I wrote “solo” for a small company in Denver. During my senior year I applied for jobs in Geology and Computer Technical Writing. The geologists saw my computer science experience and instantly pigeonholed me in computer processing of geophysical data. As a budding paleontologist, I found the geophysics stuff boring.

Connections are so important. I sent applications for technical writing jobs to many companies on the East and West coast. During that time, my father crossed paths with a fellow who worked for Digital Equipment Corporation, who suggested I send in my resume. His group had no need for technical writers, but when he received my resume, he ran it across the street to the VAX/VMS software development team. DEC flew me out to Massachusetts for an interview (what a different world!) and made me an offer the following week.

The rest, as they say, is history.

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Service NC State, continued from page 3

planning for next year, and we’re even involving other universities. Our goal for next is to package 1 million meals.”

CSLEPS, a group which encourages student growth by offering a number of volunteer activities throughout the year, coordinated the event. Service NC State was also made possible by the direct support of Stop Hunger Now and functioned as part of their effort to end world hunger.

This year, a major theme for the STC student community at NC State has been creating a “community of people” by partnering with other student groups, faculty, and members of the community through all our activities. Our involvement in Service NC State created an opportunity for this type of partnership and allowed us to continue our strong commitment to public service. In addition, we all got the change to socialize while contributing to a very worthwhile cause.

Thank you to all of you who participated; please consider taking part in next year’s Service NC State.

Andrew Armstrong is the co-president of STC@NC State.

Martin, continued from page 3

Greet,” perhaps at Mitch’s Tavern or East Village in early December.

We have a lot going on, and that takes a lot of volunteers. This year’s officers have been great at stepping up, and they are a joy to work with—a real team. We’d love to have more general members involved in our activities. If you feel any passion about any of the upcoming programs that I’ve listed, please think about contacting us to help out with them.
Website onesentence.org is concise

by John Martin

Conciseness is a critical element in technical writing. As a technical editor, it’s something I ensure in my writers’ work. Imagine my delight, then, in stumbling upon a web site entirely devoted to being concise!

Onesentence.org describes itself this way: “One Sentence is about telling your story, briefly. Insignificant stories, everyday stories, or turning-point-in-your-life stories, boiled down to their bare essentials.”

I came across this site a couple of months ago, and I’ve been making submissions ever since. My sixth submission hit the jackpot with publication on Oct. 8. People who know me know that I have very little patience in most everything in life. I have lots to do while I’m here on the planet, and I need to keep moving to get it all done.

My “winning” submission follows:

Impatient
I’m the sort of person who clicks when he sees a message that says, “Your browser should return to the message board in 2 seconds, or you can click here to go there now.”

Tags: introspective impatience

My favorite submission that has yet to be published (I’m still hopeful) is:

Extra Credit
My boyfriend, returning to school late in life and scanning this semester’s courses, asked me, “Do you think I should sign up for this drama class?” to which I replied, “You might as well get credit for it.”

Tags: boyfriend education drama queen

Here are a few of my all-time favorite entries from the site:

Xin
It wasn’t until I sat up in bed the other night questioning our relationship that I noticed the light that was coming in through the blinds fell across my chest like a prison uniform.

Tags: relationship trapped last night

Rob
Visiting Virginia, I thought the grocery clerk was calling my newborn son precious when in fact she was telling me in her southern drawl to “press yes” on the keypad.

Tags: humor fatherhood misunderstanding pride embarrassment grocery precious

Sheryl
When asked to name the one person absent from her life that she missed the most, she responded, “The person I hoped I’d be by this point in my life.”

Tags: identity self

The site allows readers to give a “thumbs up” or a “thumbs down” to entries, and Xin’s, Rob’s, and Sheryl’s are among the entries given the thumbs up more than any others. To see the “Most Popular of All Time,” point your browser to www.onesentence.org/stories/popular/all, and then press enter now! ♦

Faber, continued from page 1

The change cannot function without some form of language. The change is enacted through the language that gets used,” says Dr. Faber, the author of Discourse, Technology and Change and Community Action and Organizational Change: Image, Narrative, Identity.

Dr. Faber comes to NC State University from Clarkson University in New York, where he was an associate professor in the Department of Communication and Media.

He received his bachelor degree in English and political science from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, his master’s in English from Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, and his doctorate in English from the University of Utah. ♦
Fall 2007 Activity Calendar

**November 2007**
The Cluster Progression Program *(P)(S) Time and place to be determined.

The Back to School Program *(P)(S) Time and place to be determined.

**December**
End-of-Semester Greet *(S) Time and place to be determined.

**January 2008**
Meet & Greet (Members, faculty, and new students) Jan. 7, 6-7 p.m.
Place to be determined. *(S)(A)

**February**
STC Meeting & Social–Faculty Greet *(S)(A) Feb. 5, place to be determined.

Games Night: Backpacks vs. Briefcases *(P)(S) Time and place to be determined.

**March**
Student/Faculty Roundtable

Webinar: SurveyBuilder. *(P) Time and place to be determined.

*Technically Speaking* available online.

Webinar: Dreamweaver *(P) Time and place to be determined.

**April**
Service Raleigh *(S) Time and place to be determined.

Election of Officers for 2008-2009 Academic Year

* Networking opportunities: *(S) Social  
  *(A) Academic  
  *(P) Professional

Publications, continued from page 3

publication, Direction, to be quite informative. The homepage for this SIG’s quarterly newsletter describes it as a publication that “presents profiles of members active in the P&P field and articles full of helpful information on best practices and emerging techniques.” It is a claim that the editors and contributors back up with information on topics like content development and procedural documentation. I also highly recommend the Technical Editing SIG newsletter Corrigo for workplace testimonials and the latest in editing techniques.

These publications were a pleasant surprise when they appeared in my email, but I never anticipated getting invitations to conference calls and Webinars on various technical communication topics. STC recently sent out an invitation to its members to participate in a Webinar on Darwin Information Type Architecture (DITA), which is an XML-based architecture for producing and delivering technical information. And the Policies and Procedures SIG recently set up a conference call to talk about policies regarding the nuclear energy industry. Both of these events were designed to help keep STC members on the cutting edge of the technical communication profession.

So, the next time you hear a professor or an officer from the NCSU student community of STC talking about the advantages of being a member, you might want to consider the excellent publications that will start coming your way once you join. ♦

**Technically speaking...**

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

**Reprint policy**
You may reprint original material from this newsletter as long as you acknowledge the author and source.
ACROSS
1 Gary Wright song, or major web tool  
2 Labeler  
3 "Medium is the Message" Man  
4 Gate's brainchild  
5 Card company  
6 Heavenly hostess  
7 Study of Helvetica, Arial and Roman  
8 Early design software  
9 Online learning tool  
10 New guy on Tech Comm faculty  
11 The science of language  
12 Steve Jobs planted a seed, and got this  
13 Time Roman, for one, has them  
14 Is Your Mama a _______?  
15 They belong to Zapf  
16 Design movement from Germany  
17 Your parents and grandparents played them  
18 Spacing between characters  
19 ENG 517 author  
20 The News & Observer, for example  
21 An extra boost for college cramming nights  
22 NC State STC Prez  
23 End users, as a group  
24 Acrobat can make it  
25 Liquid or medieval weapon  
26 Time Roman, for one, has them  
27 If you don't have this, no one will read it  
28 Dictionary dude

DOWN
1 Gary Wright song, or major web tool  
2 Labeler  
3 Send and ________  
4 Take a ___  
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