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Local STC Mission Statement
Connecting students to the future of technical communication.

International STC Mission Statement
STC advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and media.

CONTACT INFORMATION
STC-NCSU
http://clubs.ncsu.edu/stc
Editor: john_williams@ncsu.edu

STC-NCSU Weblog
http://writetech.org

STC-Carolina Website
http://www.stc-carolina.org

International STC Website
http://www.stc.org

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WELL, YET ANOTHER NEW YEAR IS UPON US!
by J. Wilton Williams, Newsletter Editor

I would like to start by extending a warm welcome to all incoming masters candidates from North Carolina State University, the Technical Communications program and the NC State Student Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. You will discover that you have made a great choice in deciding to pursue advanced scholarship here. We enjoy a top-notch faculty, an ideal location and environment in which to study technical communication and a competitive yet friendly body of students in the program. Many of these students participate in the internationally-recognized NC State Student Chapter of the STC. This is the quarterly newsletter produced by that organization.

For this year’s newsletter, we are trying some new things. These new features will appear as a regular part of each quarterly issue. You will find “Gear Geek,” a section that reviews new, free tools that can be helpful to technical communications professionals. You will also find a listing of general resources that I hope you will find helpful. Please feel free to suggest resources to add to the list.

The section I am most excited about will feature a “question and answer” session with eminent scholars and perhaps a practitioner. I have some big names in the field lined up, with Johndan Johnson-Eilola opening things up in this issue. These great people have graciously volunteered their limited time to answer my questions. I hope this provides an enjoyable, refreshing look into these scholars and practitioners who operate on the cutting edge of our field.

Finally, this first issue features information about joining STC in addition to reminders about the benefits of membership in this organization. Pages 8 & 9 feature first-hand accounts from two of your fellow students who attended the 2007-2008 International STC Conference, which was held in Philadelphia. Next year’s edition will be in Atlanta, GA. You can make the first step on that journey by visiting the STC’s website at http://www.stc.org or by filling out the STC membership application provided on pages 14-15.

We have a number of great opportunities planned, beginning with a progression program on August 28 at 6pm. This event, co-sponsored by the STC-Carolina chapter, is like speed-dating and offers a chance to learn more about the many different areas in which technical communicators work. We also have a Fall Semester book drive planned, in hopes that we can gather some much needed resources to assist the still-suffering victims of Hurricane Katrina. We have other community service opportunities planned, a staple of the STC-NCSU’s regular programming. Please see the calendar on the last page of this newsletter for more information. Future issues of this newsletter will also feature additional information. Also, make sure you bookmark the STC-Carolina and STC-NCSU websites, in addition to the new STC-NCSU weblog at http://writetech.org. Have a great year and I will see you around...
Greetings to all of the students and faculty in the program this fall! A new semester is a time of excitement and hope. It’s exciting to meet new classmates and see familiar faces once again. We are all hoping for the class that will change our lives or at least give us an extra edge in the workplace.

The Society for Technical Communication student community is also looking forward to another great semester of fun and informative events. After two successive years of being a community of distinction (see more about this in the newsletter), the pressure is on for a repeat performance.

If you are new to the program, take a moment to check out the STC student community. There are advantages to being a member of this international organization. You will be given access to award-winning publications such as Intercom magazine written by some of the leaders in the technical communication field. Some of our members traveled to Philadelphia this summer to attend the national technical communication conference. And you know that space on job applications that asks for any memberships in professional organizations? You can fill it in.

Closer to home, we have some great events planned at NC State. Last semester’s faculty roundtable discussions yielded some insight on how technical communication is defined as a profession. On August 28, we have a cluster progression panel lined up in the student lounge right down the hall from your classrooms. “Speed Dating for Your Career” will pair up working professionals from the Carolina (not UNC) STC community with students looking to learn more about various technical communication careers.

When I tried to think of a word that describes our group, the one I came up with was “heart.” Our student community has heart. In our pre-semester planning meeting, we decided to make public service and charity events a focus this semester. From a book drive for victims of Hurricane Katrina to packaging food for the hungry at Service NC State, our members are demonstrating that our organization is about more that just words. You might say we wear our hearts on our PCs!

If you think that is a lame joke, then you should attend one of our events. Humor is always a part of our gatherings. Another reason you should check us out is we have fun! Our student community had a game night last semester where we played board games, cards, and even broke out a Wii. And our end-of-semester social events are always a good time.

So here’s hoping that everyone has a great semester. If you get some time between papers and projects, come check out one of our events and consider being a part of a fun and caring student community.

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Short History of Our Group

by Sarah Egan-Warren, Faculty Advisor to NCSU Chapter

In the late nineties, the STC student group was inactive and was in danger of being completely dissolved. Financial support in the form of a scholarship from the local professional chapter, the Carolina Chapter, gave me the opportunity to attend the international STC conference. While at the conference, I realized the amazing opportunity we had to offer activities for the students in the MS program that would enhance their classroom experiences and also provide some additional skills to list on their resumes.

When I returned from the conference, I recruited officers to revitalize the student chapter. The first year, the students wrote a constitution, achieved formal recognition as a student group at NC State, started a newsletter, created a web presence, and provided social, educational, and networking programs. The hard work was rewarded with a Community of Merit Award. Each year since, we have built on the previous year and learned lessons about what works with our student group and what does not.

The past two years we have received the highest honor that a group can achieve: the Community of Distinction award. In order to be eligible, we had to accomplish eight tasks at the fundamental level (having a listserv, website, calendar, etc), eight tasks at the merit level (hold elections, provide programs, submit reports to the Board, etc), eight tasks at the excellence level (approve bylaws, enter competitions, publish newsletters, secure corporate sponsorship, etc), and then as many tasks as possible at the distinction level. We hope to achieve the same again this year. With your help and support, we can!

Please consider joining STC and becoming part of our active and involved community. Come to our social, educational, and networking programs.

We are focusing on community service this year—service to the students in our program and in our college, families in our community, communities across our nation, and people around the world.
Technical Communication and the World Wide Web, an edited collection from Michael Day and Carol Lipson, features sixteen essays from some of today's leading technical communication scholars. These focus on three primary challenges effecting technical communication as it is drawn closer to the Web:

1. The Web presents challenges not addressed by existing rhetorical concepts: context, meaning and the complexity of messages. In order for online information to be successful, those creating it will require new types training and understanding of information architecture and database technologies;

2. The Web has globalized information and this is characterized by varied constructs of meaning, ethics and context;

3. The Web presents new legal and ethical considerations.

The evolution of the World Wide Web has resulted in a marked shift in the ways that we conceptualize, create, disseminate and consume information. A globalized economy means a diversified audience, from varying cultures, with differing concepts, perceptions will access information. Never before has the world experienced such an influx and availability of freely available, accessible information. The Web offers great potential and new challenges for those involved with the development of this information.

As Johnson-Eilola has noted, the postindustrial era and the rise of the World Wide Web has caused a commodification of information. Long considered an add-on to more profitable technology products, information is quickly becoming more highly valued. Markets for information and knowledge products have transformed our lives, creating new industries, new opportunities and new forms of information, while redrawing accepted concepts of time and space.

This paradigm shift has profound implications for the field of technical communication. Our primary function is the development of information products. The utility of the Web as a vehicle for delivering such information is well documented. Naturally, technical communication has a close association with the online information. Much of the information we now create becomes, in one form or another, available for online consumption.

There are marked differences between Web-based and print genres. Print-based documentation is the traditional purview of the technical communicator. However, the artifacts we create increasingly assume an online component, either as digitized forms of traditional print documents or as examples of new genres altogether.

Writing is the core competency, chief activity, and defining characteristic of technical communication. The traditional goal of our work has been to help people successfully complete specialized tasks with written texts. Our work requires knowledge of the users’ requirements and expectations. We have historically operated in subservient roles as translators or transmitters of technical information. Technical communicators are finding increased access to employment requiring enhanced skills combining writing, design and development.

The practice of technical communication has been changing to meet new demands. However, with the increased emphasis on technology, we cannot expect that good writing will keep us employed and serve our audiences. The prevailing service model that informs traditional technical communication pedagogy should adapt to meet the new realities of the information economy.

Users are consuming information in new formats. Technical communication is in an ideal situation to take a leadership role in the online, electronic information realm. Thus, Lipson and Day call for re-conceptualization of the field and a changing pedagogy.

Throughout the book, the authors suggest specific measures that will inform a pedagogy to equip technical communicators with the requisite knowledge and skills to prepare proper online information. Rice and Papper (chapter 14) present the most comprehensive discussion in the book. In what could serve as a good introduction to the book's overall themes, they frame technical communication's natural place squarely within the new online context. To Rice and Papper, instructors could teach students to create information kairotically, or the right things in the right amount at the right time (295). Doing so would be one way to incorporate new concepts into the pedagogy. Invoking McLuhan, the authors stress that now, more than ever, “the medium is the message” and this is a powerful call to prepare technical communicators with a changed pedagogy (300).

The first major theme of the book is addressed in chapters 1-4. Bill Hart-Davidson (chapter 1) highlights the the dynamic

— Continued on the next page —
The Web’s destruction of barriers of time and space means that the focus shifts to increased interaction with global audiences. The book’s second theme appears in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, as the Web’s destruction of barriers of time and space means that technical communicators require an increased understanding of varied social and cultural norms. This becomes important as our business interaction becomes increasingly global, as does the audience for our work.

George Pullman (chapter 2) and Michael J. Salvo (chapter 3) continue the discussion of the dynamic capabilities of the Web, placing more emphasis on information architecture and object-oriented content creation. Pullman believes that technical communication should position itself to assume a leadership role in how online information is created and delivered. He also stresses the value of using the emerging field of information architecture as an ideal postmodern example of a field that has positioned itself well on the online world. Salvo sees the similarities between IA and technical communication and argues for a pedagogy emphasizing awareness, user centered design, systems view, ethics and forecasting. Like others in the book, he offers an example from a course he teaches. Salvo has students analyze a physical space, looking for clues about how context affects the use of buildings. He observes that his students have reacted well to this activity and had little trouble applying their newfound knowledge to online environments.

In chapter 4, Honeycutt and McGrane offer a practical analysis of two websites to illustrate the persuasive nature of rhetoric and information architecture in an online context. They stress that students should be prepared more in the real meaning of concepts of the design and delivery of information rather than getting caught up in nomenclatures. To them, technical communicators require increased preparation in visual rhetoric, the persuasive potential of information architecture, and ethical decision-making, as they continue to develop skills in persona and scenario development, branding, taxonomies and XML.

John F. Barber (chapter 5) highlights new technologies that will become more common as the wireless web becomes more widespread. People will access information on a larger array of devices, such as PDAs, cell phones and other handheld devices. According to Barber, we need not create separate content for these devices, but rather, existing contents can be repurposed. Under this scenario, the importance of the interface is, again, of primary importance.

The book’s second theme appears in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, as the focus shifts to increased interaction with global audiences. The Web’s destruction of barriers of time and space means that technical communicators require an increased understanding of varied social and cultural norms. This becomes important as our business interaction becomes increasingly global, as does the audience for our work.

Kirk St. Amant (chapter 6) stresses the importance of educating students in the nuances of intercultural communication. These nuances include sensitivity to differing concepts of formality, humor, identity and the use of English as the accepted language of interaction. St. Amant adds that there is no pressing requirement for departments to create new courses to educate students about these changes. Rather, he argues the importance of incorporating this information into existing courses. He provides a section of resources for teachers to consult for more information.

Gil Haroounian (chapter 7) provides an analysis of cross-cultural issues that will affect future technical communication. We are reminded of differing cognitive perceptions and patterns that dictate the ways cultures attach meaning to information. As an example, he uses the prevailing Armenian perception of written information as a tool of the powerful to exploit and abuse position. In these areas and others, oral traditions have survived despite recent changes to more democratic political structures. We must understand and consider these differences with global audiences.

TyAnna Herrington’s chapter (8) comes from a distance education perspective. It surveys the difficulties she experienced creating a Global Classroom Project, an international course on technical communication. The course featured a mix of students from the US and Russia. She discusses problems caused by different time zones and students’ differing comprehension of various contexts and methods. She also addresses difficulties the students experienced as they attempted to collaborate on projects.

The third major theme (the changed legal and ethical climate created by the Web) appears in chapters 9, 10 and 11. Laura Gurak presents a summary of various legal and ethical issues present in the online world. Some of the issues are old (whistle-blowing, decision making when presented with an ethical
Part 2 features more general pedagogical suggestions. Saul Carliner (chapter 12) offers suggestions that place more emphasis on a process-oriented approach in the technical communication classroom. He feels that existing courses should remain intact with new issues and approaches introduced where possible, rather than creating new classes for each requirement that arises. This view validates the value of traditional pedagogy but also presents a convincing case for the development of new components. Susan Loudermilk (chapter 13) offers an approach to teaching students to analyze and read texts in new, online contexts. Her approach is much like Salvo’s approach, discussed earlier in chapter 3, where students learn the importance of context and factors influencing its creation, leading to an understanding that prepares students to analyze each rhetorical situation and continue to make decisions based on the anticipated user context.

The remaining chapters constitute the second part of the book. Part 2 features more general pedagogical suggestions. Saul Carliner (chapter 12) offers suggestions that place more emphasis on a process-oriented approach in the technical communication classroom. He feels that existing courses should remain intact with new issues and approaches introduced where possible, rather than creating new classes for each requirement that arises. This view validates the value of traditional pedagogy but also presents a convincing case for the development of new components. Susan Loudermilk (chapter 13) offers an approach to teaching students to analyze and read texts in new, online contexts. Her approach is much like Salvo’s approach, discussed earlier in chapter 3, where students learn the importance of context and factors influencing its creation, leading to an understanding that prepares students to analyze each rhetorical situation and continue to make decisions based on the anticipated user context.

The remaining chapters by Susan Lang (15) and Mary F. O’Sullivan (16) provide practical suggestions for incorporating new ideas and material into existing curricula. Lang offers advice for faculty wanting to incorporate the Web into an introductory technical communication course while O’Sullivan advocates for education on the community college level. Both offer sample content for courses. In an exception to the prevailing message, Lang sees utility in maintaining the service-based approach to technical communication education.

This book successfully outlines and frames the debate over pedagogical issues facing the broad field of technical communication. Valuable scholarship in a field that has struggled to find unity and identity, this book and the debate is crucial for the further development of the field. Throughout the book, the writers each demonstrate faith in technical communication’s role as a natural leader in the online realm. They all recognize that the field must adapt to the changing realities and requirements presented by this new and powerful uber-genre.

Any audience interested in technical communication will gain from a reading of this book. The book is targeted to faculty and other educational figures in the field. The authors provide numerous examples for the academic audience to use as a starting point for their own course development with some providing examples and results from their own classroom experiences.

Students of technical communication will undoubtedly benefit from a thorough reading of this volume as the issues presented within are the issues that will guide the future. Even those who are not planning to develop content for the Web will find plenty of pertinent material here, as the Web and a larger, more diverse audience (resulting from the spread of the Internet) will affect all. Well-organized, clear and well-written, this is recommended reading.

**REVIEW OF NAOMI S. BARON’S ALWAYS ON: LANGUAGE IN AN ONLINE AND MOBILE WORLD**

by Sandy Bjorkback

This book takes a closer look at how electronically-mediated communications are influencing how we read and write, speak and listen, but not in the ways we might expect. As a linguist, Baron’s perspectives on language is intriguing as she describes how it is used in instant messaging, mobile texting, blogs, wikis, and online social software. She explores the transformation of language as it confronts these current and emerging forms of technology. This is an interesting read for technical communicators to enrich our understanding of how people repurpose text and use language as technology changes.
5 QUESTIONS WITH JOHNDAN JOHNSON-EILOLA
interviewed by J. Wilton Williams, Newsletter Editor

Those of you who have been in the program for any amount of time are likely familiar with Johndan Johnson-Eilola. If you have not yet encountered Johndan’s work, you will in time.

Internationally recognized as one of today’s leading scholars on business and technical communication, Eilola’s primary focus areas are hypertext theory and practice, online communities, and the politics of technology. He has written several textbooks, in addition to Datacloud: Toward a New Theory of Online Work (Hampton Press, 2005); Writing New Media (Utah State University Press, 2005, with A. Wysocki, G. Sirc, and C. Selfe); Central Works: Landmark Essays in Technical Communication (Oxford University Press, 2005, co-edited with S. Selber), and Nostalgic Angels: Rearticulating Hypertext Writing (Greenwood/Ablex, 1999). In addition to these volumes, he has published numerous journal articles (some with our own Brenton Faber). Eilola has been working as a communications researcher since 1989 and is currently Professor of Communication and Media at Clarkson University. Johndan’s current research examines how people structure and interact with their workspaces. He is also working on an NEA-funded archival project on 1960’s and early 1970s-era avant jazz while playing in a punk band. If you are wondering about that cool name, it is Scandanavian. Learn more about Johndan and his work by visiting http://people.clarkson.edu/~johndan/

And, admittedly this is from my own perspective, practicing TCs need to get more into theory than they are. Most of the practicing TCs I’ve worked with are focused on what they need to do today and tomorrow. But those tactics only address short-term, short-pay issues. The big payoff comes from far-sighted views. Risks that pay off come from thinking beyond today’s bottom line. (I say this from deep within the bowels of the academic white towers. I’m not getting my paycheck from deliverables. But, still....)

JWW: The term “technical communicator” covers so many different types of roles: writers, editors, information architects, web developers, instructional designers, usability testers, etc.... For instance, Michael Salvo and others have written about information architecture as natural postmodern context in which to apply technical communication skills. What do you make of this? Should technical communicators look to these emergent fields and seek to define them as their natural domains? Do you see this as an advantage or disadvantage to the field and its traditional role in the creation of documentation? On a similar note, much has been written about the dilution of technical communication into so many different of roles and the resulting identity crisis within the field. What do you think about something like professional accreditation for technical communication along the lines of tests for lawyers, architects, etc.? Is it necessary? Is is possible?

JJE: IA’s not really comfortable with postmodernism--it’s based on a modernist, or more accurately a brutalist vision of architecture, where buildings conform people to their wills. Deconstructivist IA will require us to rethink how we approach information space. Not functionalist but provocative. Being easy to use is only one, fairly limited (but important) definition of good communication.

JWW: On a similar note, much has been written about the dilution of technical communication into so many different of roles and the resulting identity crisis within the field. What do you think about something like professional accreditation for technical communication along the lines of tests for lawyers, architects, etc.? Is it necessary? Is is possible?

JJE: Identity crises need to be the norm for our field. Accreditation is one response, but it’s far too norming. It might help in the short term, but it’s an easy response for lazy human resources people. TCs need to define themselves individually, as they figure out what they want to specialize in—game design, video, audio, museum installations, whatever. Being a generalist will be viable for the near future for some TCs, but many of the best jobs will be for TCs who carve out their own niches. Witness...
twitter: IfIC: helpf Ul for Coll ABorAtIon?

Twitter’s functionality or sort through the vast collection of Twitter’s usefulness comes from its free and open API that Twitter accounts (and other similar services such as identi.) filtering. The interface is attractive and allows the user to choose well, it’s not very useful at all.

For those unfamiliar with Twitter, it is an online tool that allows you to post messages (called “tweets”) of up to 140 characters in length. You visit the web site, enter your text into the field labeled “What are you doing?” and submit. Seems simple enough, right? The interface is intuitive, easy-to-use and attractive. You can search for and “follow” others who seem interesting and their “tweets” become a part of your real-time stream of updates. You might wonder how this could be useful. Well, it’s not very useful at all.

Twitter’s usefulness comes from its free and open API that allows developers to develop small applications that aggregate the collected information and disseminate it in seemingly endless ways. Generally, these tools serve as a means to extend Twitter’s functionality or sort through the vast collection of short messages in various ways. There are thousands of these mashups available on the web and these tools present a novel means of collaboration, information-sharing, communication and even research. Some are downloadable desktop applications while others are browser-based.

Here are a few examples that may be useful to technical communicators. Many run on the increasingly popular and amazing Adobe Air platform, which one can learn more about and obtain by visiting the Adobe Air site.

**Twirhrl**: This is a tiny, platform-independent desktop client that runs on Adobe Air. It allows one to connect to multiple Twitter accounts (and other similar services such as identi.ca, Friendfeed and seesmic). It provides notifications on new messages, shortens long URLs so that you don’t use up your character limit on long links and provides a way to upload images to TwitPic (more on that later). It allows one to track followed “tweets,” in addition to providing other forms of filtering. The interface is attractive and allows the user to choose from a broad variety of color schemes. There are other popular desktop clients, including Twitterific, Spaz and Twit. All provide similar functionality.

Firefox browser plugins: If you prefer to stay within the browser when working or playing on the web, there is a seemingly endless selection of utilities incorporating Twitter’s functionality into Firefox. Most of these apps do little more than provide place to compose your messages and send to Twitter. Ludicrous allows you to post from the Firefox search bar, while Twitterbar does the same, except from the address bar. Tweetbin and Twitterfox provide a little more functionality, as their placement in the sidebar allows for the display of additional information.

**GroupTweet** is an application that facilitates the creation of workgroups, ensuring that those you are working with are all connected and able to receive group messages. This would be a crucial part of a Twitter group setup, as it only aggregates the messages that satisfy the predetermined criteria for the group.

**Seesmic**: Users can upload video directly from their webcam and post directly to Twitter by automatically posting a short video URL. It will soon allow users to record Skype video and chats. **Twiddeo** also allows you to post videos to your tweets.

**Tweetr**: This application allows you to drag an image, document, pdf or video file onto an icon, which then uploads the file to the server. It then returns a unique URL that you can then use to share the file with others.

**Twit Plus (Twit+) and TwitPic** are two examples that allow users to send pictures, video or files privately to friends (or in this case, others in your workgroup). This could, perhaps, be helpful for project work when photo and multimedia files need to be easily and quickly shared between several remote team members.

**Twetter** is an amazing application that allows users to drag just about any file onto an icon, to receive a short URL pointing to where the file was uploaded. Share the URL with others and they can download the file from anywhere. The best part of this is that the files can be as large as 10MB! Tweetr also works seamlessly with most webcams, which I could see being helpful, for instance, for conducting quick $10 usability tests.

There are other ways to use Twitter, such as taking polling via Strawpoll, Twitterpolls and PollDaddy; you can find other like-minded individuals using tools such as Twit Like Me and “stalk” them; you will find tools that allow you to post quick messages to your blog, now or at a set time in the future; you can even obtain tools that provide traffic updates (CommuterFeed) and assist you in quitting smoking (Quitter).

As you can see, the possibilities are seemingly endless with Twitter. If employed properly, it can be a free, helpful tool for technical communications professionals or others working in collaborative environments.
A recurrent theme at the Society of Technical Communication, and at its 55th annual conference held earlier this summer, is “Telling Our Powerful Story;” in other words, marketing the value of technical communication to society.

But how can one tell a story, powerful or otherwise, without characters, motivation, tone, theme, history? How can we tell our own powerful story if we don’t really know who we are?

The massive umbrella of “technical communication” – writing and editing for a myriad of disciplines, usability studies, document and information design, web design, mobile communication, project management – is a great strength of the field, but also a weakness. The range of technical communication is so broad that we struggle to identify ourselves.

At the conference, it was clear that the STC is working to address that very subject. A centerpiece in the Philadelphia Convention Center was a wall-sized document, studded with post-it notes and detailing the skills, tools and jobs that are part of technical communication. Attendees were asked to post suggestions, additions and reclassifications to the wall. At approximately four feet tall and eight feet wide, it was a site map to technical communication, easily the largest document at the conference.

The wall represented one of the first steps in building a technical communication body of knowledge, a kind of compendium defining skills, concepts and fundamentals – basically everything that technical communicators do, think, read and use in their work.

The work began in earnest in early January. Task Force member Ginny Redish, a 25-year leader in technical communication, built the wall’s predecessor with more than 100 sticky notes on a conference room walls. Task Force members and other STC members spend the afternoon rearranging and reclassifying the various roles found in technical communication.

In the end, Redish and the other Task Force members said the body of knowledge will likely be housed on the Internet as a Technical Communication Knowledge Portal, similar to the open and Web-delivered Body of Knowledge compiled by the Usability Professionals’ Association.

**KNOWLEDGE PORTAL**

They said the portal will help technical communication become a recognized and valued profession, and will offer professionals an important self-assessment tool for their continued development.

“This is where you can find what you want for your professional development,” Hughes said.

Their efforts reflect the first and second goals of the STC’s Strategic Plan: “Define the profession of technical communication,” and “Communicate the value of technical communication.”

Larry Kunz, a former STC second vice president and a member of STC Carolina, said that first goal is crucial to the success of technical communicators around the world. “We’ve been saying that we’re professionals. We need to be serious about defining the profession of technical communication.”

For more on STC’s Body of Knowledge and materials from the conference, go to [http://www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org).

On a personal note, the STC conference was a near-perfect blend of gaining knowledge and making friends, education and networking. Triangle area communicators were well represented at the conference; they are even more likely to attend the next conference in Atlanta May 3-6. I highly recommend doing your best to get to Atlanta next year.

My attending the conference was made possible by a scholarship from STC Carolina, the Triangle chapter of professional technical communicators. Thank you to STC Carolina, a winner of the STC Award of Excellence, for its generous support for and friendship with the student community.
ATTENDING THE 2008 STC SUMMIT (OR, WHAT I DID THIS SUMMER)

by Rebecca O’Connell

One of the highlights of my summer was going to Philadelphia from June 1 to June 4 to attend the 2008 STC summit. The STC summit took place at the Philadelphia Convention Center, with some of the events being held at the Marriot across the street. The NCSU contingent included me, recently graduated STC Co-President Andrew Armstrong and current Co-President John Strange. Together, we met new people, saw exotic places, and learned more about the wonderful world of Technical Communication.

"...Networking is an important part of attending an STC summit. You can meet people from across the Technical Communication spectrum..."

My registration was free because I was a student volunteer. The primary job of the student volunteers was to help out with individual sessions. “Helping” consisted of: (1) handing out evaluation forms at the beginning of the session and collecting them at the end, (2) getting help if something was wrong with the room or the equipment, and (3) wearing a name badge with a huge yellow "Ask Me" button attached to it. Since I only knew things about the sessions I was helping with, I usually held my manila envelope full of evaluations in front of my badge when I walked from place to place. There was one student per session, and sessions were first-come-first-served. Fortunately, if you didn’t like the session you got/got stuck with, you were free to pass out your forms, sneak out to another session, and come back ten minutes before the end of the session to collect the forms. If you do volunteer, be sure to ask up front about what is or is not expected of you. I missed a number of sessions I really wanted to go to because it took me half a day to realize that I was free to sneak out of sessions that I was assisting with. Also, be aware that you are committing yourself for most or all of the session periods, so don’t plan on being able to skip out and go site seeing. Your evenings, however, would be your own.

Networking is an important part of attending an STC summit. You can meet people from across the Technical Communication spectrum. You can meet people from across the Technical Communication spectrum. You can hear about life at other universities and life in the world of work. My roommate, for instance, was a volunteer who attends school at Kennesaw State University in Atlanta (host city of next year’s conference). She was considering a change in focus to Technical Editing, and a change in universities (to Georgia Tech). My tablemate at the STC dance was a technical editor who does work for Microsoft. At the mixer before the Awards Banquet, I met people from SAS and the Carolina Chapter of the STC. (Actually, that was just one person. Another reason to join STC.) You can meet people who are hiring, and people who know people who are hiring.

You can also meet some people whose names you may know (or may soon know) from your textbooks and in-class articles: Ginny Reddish, Cheryl Geisler, Saul Carliner, and Carolyn Rude are just a few examples. Don’t know these names? If you are a student in the Technical Communication program, you soon will. You can also meet the people who taught your teachers. If you meet a professor from Rensselaer, start throwing out names of people whose courses you’ve taken. Odds are good there will be a familiar name somewhere in that list.

Speaking of the awards banquet, while I did not attend (it was $60), John Strange and Andrew Armstrong went to receive our Community of Distinction award. I did, however, attend the mixer before hand. The mixer is free if you’re not thirsty, $4 if you’d like a soda, $11 if you want something stronger. I went with the free option.

There were anywhere from seven to 15 presentations in each time slot, with six tracks. This was hefty competition, and attendance at sessions ranged anywhere from seven people (in a large room) to over 120 (in an even larger room), with people sitting on the floors and spilling out the doors. One important factor in whether you presented to seven people or 120 was how good a job your presentation’s title did of convincing your very fickle prospective audience that they would learn something relevant to their lives by attending your presentation. I, for instance, learned how to create and evaluate a post-document. A post-document is a text that has become too cool to hang out with other documents. No, kidding, a post-document is a living text, a text that is designed to be part of an ongoing interaction, to engage its reader/participants rather than just getting them

– Continued on Page 13 –
MEET THE 2008-2009 STC OFFICERS

Brian Swiger
Co-President
bwswiger@yahoo.com

Sarah Egan Warren
Faculty Advisor
sarah@warrensweb.com

John Strange
Co-President
jstrange4@nc.rr.com

Rebecca O’Connell
Activity Manager
rebecca321@gmail.com

Sandy Bjorkback
Secretary
sandydave@att.net

Ann Roth-Strickland
Membership Manager
arothstrickland@gmail.com

Jen Riehle
VP/Webmaster
jen_riehle@ncsu.edu

Myra Moses
Newsletter Manager
myra_moses@ncsu.edu

Christin Phelps
Treasurer
caphelps@ncsu.edu

J. Wilton Williams
Newsletter Editor
john_williams@ncsu.edu

John Strange
Co-President
jstrange4@nc.rr.com

Sandy Bjorkback
Secretary
sandydave@att.net

Ann Roth-Strickland
Membership Manager
arothstrickland@gmail.com
the huge number of TC-related jobs that now go to people in other disciplines. Any accreditation will only help if it can move beyond a handful of core courses (and most certification initiatives quickly move to being more expansive and less valuable, because that’s how they tend to define their brand identities).

JWW: What have you found to be some of the more difficult concepts to teach students in your program?

JJE: Being intellectually inquisitive. Being open to the fact that most interesting problem spaces have more than one solution. Being open to the fact that "solution" is only rarely the best approach.

JWW: How did you get into technical communication? At what point in your professional or academic career did you decide to focus on technical communication? How or why did you make this decision?

JJE: Actually, I’m sort of a problem child there. I entered college with the intention to be a petroleum engineer with a geological engineering degree. But all my classes during my first year were basically memorization of crystalline structures and chemistry, and at the end of my first year I had accumulated a 1.05/4.0 GPA. My mom wanted me to drop out and join the army, but I’d had an honor’s English course first semester that I’d liked enough to get an A in. We read Annie Dillard, Dostoyevsky, and Hunter S Thompson, and when I was in the midst of flunking out, I went to talk to the prof from that course. He recommended I look into the TC program in their department. I finished the BS degree in TC as Michigan Tech was building the MS degree, then snagged a full-ride fellowship in the PhD program as they were putting that degree online. Being on a fellowship is way less work than a real job, or at the least more interesting to a theory person, so I ended up in academia.

After that, I branched out rapidly. I don’t actually do work in TC any more. I sometimes publish in the journals, and I’m on a bunch of editorial boards, but I don’t really ready the field’s journals or books any more. Most of my interests are in other fields—architecture, music, philosophy, labor theory, sociology, etc.

JWW: You are taking a group of students to a remote location for 6 months to turn them into good technical communicators...sort of like tech comm boot camp. What three books do you take? In other words, desert island books for TC? What three records do you take?

JJE: Three books would be impossible to settle on. I’d probably bring an iPhone and have them spend their time analyzing the good and bad aspects of that. I bought one last year, and it’s a thing of frustrating beauty.

There are enough good and bad examples of design around in our daily lives that the key issue isn’t instructions on how to do good design, but the ability to approach design contexts with an open and agile mind. Given my theory leanings, any books would be left-field options like Deleuze & Guattari’s One Thousand Plateaus or Tschumi’s Architecture and Disjunction (both of which I’ve probably used in my work more than any book on tech comm).

And "Records"? What, are you an old person? People don’t have "records" any more. They have iTunes database and hard drives now.

I have something like a couple of terabytes of music files scattered among drives in my house, across four or five computers (see the attached image) I keep thinking I should move to some RAID or NAT storage), but here’s an iTunes Shuffle of my main music feed. I probably have to note that I clicked "refresh" several times until my band, "Norm Chomsky," came up in the shuffle.I’m the guy on the left trying to remember how to play an Em chord. But you’ll get the drift. CLICK TO VIEW JOHNDAN’S REFERENCED ITUNES SHUFFLE FEED.

STC-NCSU HAS A NEW BLOG

Our Co-President and longtime professional journalist John Strange was surprised to be turned town for a position last year because of his lack of blogging experience. He suggested to chapter officers that an STC-NC State blog would provide the the student community with much-needed experience using an established technical communication tool.

The result is WriteTech (available at http://www.writetech.org). Michelle Tackabery, last year’s STC-NCSU membership manager, approached colleagues at Coal March Productions to see if the company would assist the chapter with the project. Coal March agreed and went above and beyond, donating much of the design work and providing us with a copy of their own CoalEngine© content management system.

This generosity makes Coal March Productions a true friend of our chapter and their generosity does not go unnoticed. Thank you Coal March!!! Learn more about Coal March Productions by visiting : http://www.coalmarch.com

To obtain posting rights or to learn more, please contact John Strange at jestrang@ncsu.edu
This section features a listing of helpful resources. Some are websites, some are blogs, some are newsgroups and others are list-serve type of things. The Triangle area happens to be a VERY busy area, with an overwhelming number of resources for technical communicators. Hopefully, this list will be a helpful means to aggregate all of this information. If you are aware of a resource that you think would be helpful to others and you think it should be included on this list, please send the name, a short description and the URL to john_williams@ncsu.edu. Please note that the Department maintains a separate, more comprehensive list of resources.

**NCSU AND LOCAL RESOURCES**

- NCSU Technical Communication Department
  - Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media (CRDM) Ph.D
  - NCSU Graduate School
  - DH Hill Library
  - NCSU Digital Media Lab Usability Lab

- General STC Resources
  - International STC Site
  - Carolina Chapter of the STC
  - NCSU Student Chapter of the STC
  - NCSU Student Chapter of the STC Weblog

- Networking & Learning
  - Usability Professionals Association
  - Triangle Usability Professionals Association
  - Triangle DITA Users
  - E-Server Technical Communication Library
  - A Nice Listing of Rhetoric & Communication Journals
  - Techwr-L (a resource site focused on Technical Writing)
  - Adobe's Blog for its Technical Communication Suite

- Cool and Free Tools (If You Don't Have the Dough for Adobe Products)
  - Dreamspark/Microsoft Expression (Thousands of $$)
  - Lotus Symphony (free apps suite from IBM)
  - Open Office (great, free, open-source full office suite)
  - General Listing of Free Web Applications
  - Wufoo (free, easy form builder)
  - Adobe Photoshop Express (free basic Photoshop image editing)
  - Splashup (free, online image editing)
  - XNView (great free file browser)
  - Format Pixel (web app for creating 'page' based presentations)

- Other Things to Watch For

  **Ronnie Duncan's job Hunting Tips:** every now and then, Ronnie Duncan, principle of Timely Text (http://www.timelytext.com/) will visit to deliver a presentation of critical interviewing and job hunt skills. This has become a popular event in the department and a opportunity you cannot afford to miss.

  **Dr. Dicks' listserve messages:** Dr. Dicks circulates frequent listserve messages, featuring hot tips on local and regional employment opportunities. Many of these positions are either unlisted or posted with Dr. Dicks first. Enrolled students and alumni are the only ones who receive these messages, so make sure you have your spam filter cleared to receive these messages.

  **IBM-NCSU Pathfinder Mentoring Program:** This is a joint venture between NCSU and IBM to provide students the unique opportunity to spend time with current professionals in their domain expertise areas and learn more about life in the field.

  **Public Service Opportunities:** The NCSU Student Chapter of the STC organizes several public service events per year. The group has made public service a priority for this academic year, so watch out for numerous opportunities to give something back to your community.
from point A to point B with the least possible amount of time and work. Effective participatory document design was one of the many themes of the conference, especially among the more academically-oriented presentations.

One example of this was the presentation on "Assessing the Usability and Usefulness of Technical Communication," by a group from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. This group was headed up by Cheryl Geisler and Roger Grice (who couldn’t make it to the summit). The group was presenting their "Toolkit for Tech Mediated Communication," which contains design heuristics and usability metrics for technology mediated communication.


Ginny Reddish did a presentation on "Writing as an Asynchronous Conversation." She presented some linguistic theories and showed how they can be applied to written communication. The theories of conversation mentioned in this talk would be very familiar to anyone who has taken "Discourse Analysis" (ENG 527).

So, what can you learn from this article? (1) Learning is much more fun if it’s done during an out of town trip. (2) If you go to an STC Summit, be sure to check the notice board, because this is where the meeting time and place for the pub-crawl is posted. (3) People who join STC get to visit exotic places and meet "celebrities," all while landing a well-paying job.

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**Curious About the Varieties of Technical Communication?**

Then come to our August program, which offers a progression session where you can learn about them.

**Time:** 6:00 p.m.
**Date:** Thursday, August 28, 2008
**Place:** Caldwell Lounge at N.C. State University

A progression has many different speakers presenting on various topics simultaneously. Speakers will each host a table with a presentation on a topic from their own area of practice. Attendees hear a twenty minute presentation about one topic, and then move to another table to hear the next twenty minute presentation and so on...kind of like speed dating for your tech comm career!!!

**ALL STUDENTS WELCOME, REGARDLESS OF MAJOR or ACADEMIC STANDING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rick Sapir</td>
<td>Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Wenger</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann-Marie Grissino</td>
<td>Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Hampton</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Feldman</td>
<td>Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Brown</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
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The following events are planned. Please visit the STC-NCSU Weblog or monitor future issues of TechnicallySpeaking for updated information as it becomes available. All dates and events are tentative and subject to change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Type of Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 18, 2008</td>
<td>Incoming Masters Candidate Orientation</td>
<td>E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 22, 23</td>
<td>NCSU Service Raleigh</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 28</td>
<td>Progression Program/Speed Dating for Your Career (co-sponsored with STC-Carolina)</td>
<td>E, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Book Drive for Hurricane Katrina Victims Begins</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early October</td>
<td>Roundtable - PhD Communication Rhetoric and Digital Media Discussion to provide tips on what you need to do get into the program</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-October</td>
<td>Advising for Spring 2009 Semester</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Alumni Roundtable-former students discuss life after graduate school</td>
<td>E, N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-December (tba)</td>
<td>Book drive for Katrina Victims ends</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-December (tba)</td>
<td>End-of-Semester Happy Hour</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January (tba) 2009</td>
<td>Grant writing for Autism Non-Profits Workshop</td>
<td>C, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February (tba)</td>
<td>2nd Annual Game Day (co-sponsored with STC-Carolina)</td>
<td>S, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March (tba)</td>
<td>Charity Event- to be determined</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late-March (after Spring Break)</td>
<td>Advising &amp; Registration for Fall 2009 Semester</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>STC-NCSU Officer Elections</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April (tbd)</td>
<td>&quot;Relay for Life&quot; for American Cancer Society</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May (typically, last 2 weeks of semester)</td>
<td>Thesis Project Defenses</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key for the above Types of Events:
E=Educational   C=Charity   N=Networking   S=Social
# STC Membership Application

**Society for Technical Communication**

### 1. Please Print:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Membership Category</th>
<th>Year Lapsed</th>
<th>Member Number</th>
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**Company/Organization**

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<th>Street Address</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>State/Province</th>
<th>Zip/Postal Code</th>
<th>Country</th>
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</table>

**Phone**

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<tr>
<th>Ext.</th>
<th>Fax</th>
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</table>

**Email**

*For use only. Your email address will not be released to non-STC parties.*

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### 2. Specify Restriction(s):

- [ ] Do not list me in the online Membership Directory.
- [ ] List me in the online Membership Directory, but exclude my:
  - [ ] Street address
  - [ ] E-mail address
  - [ ] Phone number
  - [ ] Fax number
- [ ] Do not send STC announcements to me via e-mail.
- [ ] Only send my STC election materials via e-mail.
- [ ] Do not send STC campaign materials via e-mail.

### 3. Indicate Job Function(s):

- Consultant
- Contractor
- Documentation Specialist
- Editor
- Graphic Artist/Illustrator
- Indexer
- Information Developer
- Instructional Designer
- Manager
- Online Help Developer
- Self Employed
- Teacher/Educator
- Training Developer
- Translator
- Usability Specialist
- Web Designer
- Writer
- Other: ________________________________

### 4. Select the Type of Membership that Best Fits Your Needs:

#### Membership Categories

- **CLASSIC:** Includes printed copies of Intercom and Technical Communication and membership in: 1 chapter and 1 SIG, OR up to 3 SIGs and no chapter.
- **E-MEMBERSHIP:** Includes online access to Intercom and Technical Communication and membership in: 1 chapter and 1 SIG, OR up to 3 SIGs.
- **STUDENT:** Includes online access to Intercom and Technical Communication and membership in up to 3 SIGs. Applicants for student membership may select 1 professional chapter and 1 student chapter. To be eligible for student membership, an applicant must be:
  1. Enrolled in an accredited university, college, community college, or technical school;
  2. Taking at least two courses or their equivalent each term; and
  3. Preparing for a career in technical communication. Student members are not eligible to vote in STC elections. To attest to your student status, please supply the name and telephone number or e-mail address of your faculty advisor:
- **SUPER SIG PACKAGE:** Includes printed copies of Intercom and Technical Communication and membership in all SIGs and 1 chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Categories</th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Other Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLASSIC:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$175</strong></td>
<td><strong>$140</strong></td>
<td><strong>$100</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15</strong></td>
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<td><strong>E-MEMBERSHIP:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$165</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STUDENT:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>$55</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUPER SIG PACKAGE:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>$300</strong></td>
<td><strong>$300</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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* Tiers: For information, please refer to the STC Web site at [www.stc.org/membership/localTable01.asp](http://www.stc.org/membership/localTable01.asp)

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* Additional Non-U.S. Postage charges are added to help offset the additional cost of mailings to non-U.S. locations.*

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* See reverse for continuation.*
5. GEOGRAPHIC-BASED COMMUNITIES (CHAPTERS) SELECTION:

FOR THE CHAPTER INCLUDED WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

☐ ASSIGN ME TO THE CLOSEST CHAPTER   OR   LIST CHOICE: _______________________________________________________

Refer to http://www.stc.org/membership/chapterSearch01.asp for a list of chapters.
Select additional chapters in section 7 below.

6. SELECT SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS):

Check the appropriate number of SIGs that you would like to join. The number of SIGs must equal the total number of SIGs included with your membership category. Add any additional SIGs you choose to purchase at $10 each in section 7 below. For detailed descriptions of the SIGs, please refer to the STC Web site at www.stc.org/membership/sigLinks01.asp

☐ Academic
☐ AccessAbility
☐ Canadian Issues
☐ Consulting & Independent Contracting
☐ Emerging Technologies
☐ Environmental, Safety, & Health Communication
☐ Europe
☐ Illustrators & Visual Designers
☐ Information Design & Architecture
☐ Instructional Design & Learning
☐ International Technical Communication
☐ Lone Writer
☐ Management
☐ Marketing Communication
☐ Online
☐ Policies & Procedures
☐ Quality & Process Improvement
☐ Scientific Communication
☐ Single Sourcing
☐ Technical Editing
☐ Usability and User Experience

7. CALCULATE MEMBERSHIP CHARGES:

DUES (AND POSTAGE, IF APPLICABLE, FROM SECTION 4) $____

ENROLLMENT FEE: NEW MEMBERS OR MEMBERS WHO HAVE NOT RENEWED FOR MORE THAN ONE YEAR. $30.00

REINSTATEMENT FEE: MEMBERS WHOSE MEMBERSHIP EXPIRED LESS THAN ONE YEAR AGO. $15.00

In addition to the communities included in your membership category, you may add chapters and SIGs at an extra cost:

ADDITIONAL SIG MEMBERSHIPS ($10 each) ___ x $10 = $____

ADDITIONAL CHAPTER MEMBERSHIPS ($25 each) ___ x $25 = $____

LIST ADDITIONAL CHAPTER NAMES: ________________________

TOTAL: $____

PLEASE NOTE: STC membership is based on a calendar year. Dues will be prorated. See www.stc.org/membership/ProrationSchedule.asp
No refunds will be issued for cancelled memberships.
PRORATION SCHEDULE: January - June 30: New members pay full dues for membership through December 31.
July - September 30: New members pay 50% of full dues for membership through December 31.
October - December 31: New members pay 25% of full dues for membership through December 31.

8. PAYMENT OPTIONS:

☐ CHECK: Make checks payable to STC in U.S. dollars. International members must make checks payable in U.S. dollars and drawn on a U.S. bank.

☐ CREDIT CARD: Complete the credit card information box below if paying by credit card. Payment by credit card is encouraged. (Payments cannot be made by phone.)

PLEASE CHARGE MY: ☐ Visa   ☐ MasterCard   ☐ American Express

Card Number _______ Exp. Date _______

Cardholder’s Name (please print) ___________________________ Cardholder’s Signature ___________________________

Please mail this form to:
Society for Technical Communication
P.O. Box 79612
Baltimore, MD 21279-0612 USA

MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE NOT REFUNDABLE.
By joining STC, you agree to abide by the STC Bylaws.
You must join STC by February 28 to be eligible to vote in the Society elections.