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Presidential Remarks

*by Natalie Roelant
STC/SM Chapter President*

Remember when you were younger and you would pluck the petals off of flowers (he loves me...he loves me not...) or turn to your Magic 8 Ball for answers or advice? It seems like when we were younger we had so many ways to find solutions and answers to our toughest questions.

I wish I had a Magic 8 Ball so I could shake it really hard and ask it, "What is the future of technical writing in greater Detroit?" or "How will STC International's transformation affect our individual chapter?"

But, alas, no Magic 8 Ball. I can tell you if you are interested in learning more about transformation and how it will affect your individual membership, there are plenty of articles and a discussion list that you can join or review (log into: <http://stc.org/transformation/Default.asp>). Elsewhere in this edition of *TECHcomments*, you will find an article giving you more information on transformation and new membership categories.

As to the future of technical writing in greater Detroit, well, I don't have any answers there either. But, if you attended our September program at AAA, our new program manager, Dunrie Greiling, and her team presented a panel discussion to share highlights and key messages from the 51st Annual STC Conference in Baltimore last May. One of the topics was the overall future and emerging trends of the technical writing position.

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SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

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

www.stc.org

TECHcomments

The newsletter of the
Southeastern Michigan Chapter of the
Society for Technical Communication

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Please e-mail submissions to
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Presidential Remarks

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As our 2004-2005 year begins, I hope each of you will take the time to visit the revamped STC International site (www.stc.org), attend one of our programs, participate in a listserv discussion, volunteer to assist with a task or activity, attend a regional conference, or join us at a networking luncheon.

These are the member value benefits of your STC membership and I hope you take advantage of any and all the services STC offers you. <end/>

TECHcomments Team Welcomes Your Contributions

The TECHcomments team welcomes you! Do you have an experience with a process, tool, or educational program you'd like to write about? Would you like to contribute a review of a recent book you've read that might be of special interest to others in our field? Are you willing to share the story of how you became a technical writer and the various paths your career has taken? Please contact editor Mary Jo David at (734) 392-0019 or e-mail her at: maryjo@writeawayent.com or newsletter@stc-sm.org. We look forward to your involvement with the TECHcomments newsletter.

STC-SM'ers Leave Their Mark at Baltimore Conference

A subset of the STC Southeastern Michigan chapter contingent gathered for a photo at the 51st Annual International STC Conference in Baltimore this past May. Pictured are (front row, left to right) Natalie Roelant, Bill Peters, Susan Korbal, Christine Pellar-Kosbar, Lanette Cornwell, and (back row, left to right) Seth Seppanen, Maryann Bowen, JoAnn Keosaian, Teresa Toth-Fejel, and Mary Jo David. Apologies to other STC/SM'ers who attended but didn't get word about the photo op!



Networking Over Lunch

May Recap *by Emily Eisbruch*

It's a tough question, but here goes. What do the following have in common: EPA modeling systems for measuring vehicle emissions, backyard landscaping, and photography classes at Washtenaw Community College? The answer is very simple: these were all topics discussed at the May 11th Ann Arbor area STC Networking Lunch held at Paesano's Restaurant.

The host for this gathering was Doug Howell, who has coordinated several of the monthly networking lunches this year. Doug—an Information Architect for Borders—always has interesting stories to tell about his house projects, community involvement, and professional life. Other Ann Arbor area networking lunches are hosted by Kathy Carter, who established the Ann Arbor STC Networking Lunch tradition many years ago, and has been doing a wonderful job keeping it going ever since. Kathy has a long professional association with the Environmental Protection Agency—this explains our discussion of fuel emission models.

May Networking Lunch, Ann Arbor. From left: Doug Howell, Kathy Carter, Cynthia Leet, Emily Eisbruch

Since 1995, I've been attending these networking lunches on and off and never fail to have fun, make new friends and contacts, learn a bit about our profession, and—of course—enjoy a good meal. For example, at the May networking lunch, I met Cynthia Leet, who is currently completing an Associates degree in photography at Washtenaw Community College to augment her writing skills. She is currently looking for work 20 or 30 hours a week to support herself while she finishes classes.

June Recap *by Doug Howell*

The June 23rd Ann Arbor Networking Lunch was held at the Olive Garden on Eisenhower Parkway. I hosted this networking opportunity, with David Storer and Mary Jo David attending. In spite of the light attendance, we enjoyed the lunch fare, nice atmosphere, and conversation, which centered around David's unique approach to job hunting.

David has decided to start his own writer coaching business. He shared his current planning and advertising strategy, and then Doug and Mary Jo jumped in with some suggestions:

- Perhaps he could survey writers—or employers—to determine their needs.
- Maybe he could market himself to people (or employers of people) working in sales, programming, or other areas where writing is required but where good writing skills are often lacking.

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Community Comments

by Cynthia L. Leet

Opinions were negative or guardedly optimistic among Southeastern Michigan Chapter members who answered a telephone survey on the question:

Do you think we are in a recovery?

Vicki Fulkerson: "We're not in a recovery. Maybe for some portions, but not in a recovery for the working class and the middle class."

Cheri Noble: "I don't see companies growing. Things are staying the same."

Susan Dowswell: "We're at the beginning of a recovery."

Pamela Bennett: "I see more people getting jobs who have been looking. We're probably tending in the right direction."

Sally Goldberg: "People in our industry who have been out of work for a long time have been getting interviewed, and this might indicate that we are coming out of the recession."

This column is the newsletter team's attempt to collect random opinions from fellow STC/SM members in response to a different, pertinent question each issue. We only contact a handful of members each time, so if you're contacted to contribute, please consider sharing your thoughts.



Vicki Fulkerson



Sally Goldberg

October STC/SM Program

“Fun and Fearless Speaking”

by Linda Meloche
Dale Carnegie Systems

Date: Thursday, October 21, 2004
Time: 6:30 PM
Location: Borders Group, Ann Arbor



Want to be less fearful and more effective when speaking? Then don't miss this presentation! Linda Meloche is a trainer and marketing consultant for Dale Carnegie Systems. An instructor for over 18 years, she has personally trained over 2,500 people in the art of effective speaking.

Learn tips, tricks, and secrets to be more effective when speaking in front of groups in this fun and fast-paced session. You will find the answers to questions such as:

- “What do I do if I lose my train of thought?”
- “How can I make a scientific presentation more compelling?”
- “Should I write out my talk?”

- “What if English is not my native language?”
- “What do I do with my hands when I speak?”
- “How can I make my PowerPoint presentation interesting?”
- “How do I make an audience remember me?”

You will also have the opportunity to have your specific speaking challenges and questions addressed.

Additional information will be released via the listserv, by postcard, and at our website, www.stc-sm.org, when it becomes available. We hope to see you there!

From the Front Lines

by Doug Howell

Work. You can't live with it. You can't live without it. Whether our jobs are a source of fulfillment or frustration, accomplishment or anxiety, a growing number of STC members are thankful for them—because a growing number of STC members are without them.

The current economic downturn has taken a heavy toll on technical communicators. Most STC members, even those not affected personally by the latest economic sour notes, know members who are. We asked a few of our members to give us an up-close and personal report “from the front lines,” and from their own, often challenging, experiences.

STC Members on the Front Lines

Kevin Bell was laid off a few months ago from his position as Technical Writer. Because the economy's been slow the last couple of years, he's not very optimistic about finding a new position quickly. He feels there's been a net loss of Information Technology jobs over the period, resulting in a very challenging environment for anyone seeking IT-related jobs. Though he's seen a few more job postings in the last couple of months, there always seems to be a glut of writers responding to each one. Bottom line? It's going to take a lot longer for him to find a job than it did the last time he was in the market, six years ago.

A few months before Kevin's job evaporated, Joan Johnson was laid off from her Senior Technical Writer job. Up until then, she edited and designed training materials (including online help) for her employer, a producer of engineering software. Though she's been out of work longer, at the time of this writing she still doesn't have full-time employment. Her current contract position (started the week of our interview) has provided a flicker of light, but since the job is of undetermined duration, the flicker could easily go out. Besides that, while it flickers she has to pay all her own benefits.

Meanwhile, Nancy Sock is busy trying to survive. She has been a freelance writer and instructional designer for ten years. In all that time, her business, Iris Communications, has never seen a slump like this one. She's only had one “real tech writing job” in a year and three months. There have been slow times before, but this is different. And it's not just her. She knows other writers who have been looking for freelance or full-time work for quite some time and getting nowhere. She realized after the first few months that this slump was different. And now it's gone on for another year.

Any Jobs Out There?

Our interviewees all agreed on one thing, in fact, several things: the availability of technical communication jobs has greatly decreased in the last several years. That, combined with more people applying for those jobs, has had a major impact on the time it takes to land a good job—or even a job, for that matter.

Kevin has been through this before, several times, but says things have changed since he set out on his last hunt. It used to be, it took him six to eight months to find a job. Now it looks as though it will take at least twice that long. He hears the same story from programmers and other IT professionals, too.

Joan found a fair number of things to apply for during the first quarter, but things have thinned out since. Even though she's wading in a wider job pool, she's had only four or five interviews since January, two of which progressed to a second interview. This is the first time she's been laid off. Her brother-in-law, a plumber, just laughs at her. It seems that everyone needs a plumber, but not everyone needs a writer. And even if they do need one, you fight the general impression many employers have that “anyone can write.” Of course, we writers know that makes as much sense as saying “anyone can plumb.” Yet Joan has found that employers who value a writer's subject knowledge and skill in putting one word in front of another are rare finds. Luckily, she found one of these enlightened folks and has scored a contract position.

Joan hears a lot of rhetoric about the economy getting better. Though that may be true in other places, it doesn't seem to be the case in her world. Many technology-related jobs (not just programming) are wandering across "the big pond," as she delicately puts it. She thinks the reason might be plain old economics: When public schools get into financial trouble, they always cancel the arts and music programs first. While they're aesthetically pleasing, they don't bring in the big bucks.

She thinks that some of the recent bounce in unemployment numbers might be due to people giving up and dropping off the unemployment rolls altogether. She personally knows of a couple writers who've been out of work for a couple of years and have done just that.

For many writers, temporary employment services have helped during slow times. But Joan has found nothing at Kelly Services. It seems customers just aren't calling for tech writers. She contacted them in early July, and weeks later she had heard nothing. If she was given to "huge amounts of worry," she'd be worrying.

Nancy struggles to understand what's happening. Where's the work? Is it coming back? If so, when? Is the field in a slump or a nose dive? There are precious few full-time jobs and even fewer for freelancers. Many of her former clients are no longer in business or have been acquired by larger organizations that don't use freelancers. She has found, like Joan, that work she always falls back on during really tough times—medical transcription, legal admin, clerical—isn't there either. On top of everything else, it appears there are desperate laid-off writers out there submitting rock-bottom bids on contract work.

While she too has experienced some ups and downs, she strives not to become cynical. Still, a theory put forth by an unemployed colleague—that companies aren't hiring because they're just not doing the work—makes sense. For example, how much documentation or online help is provided with software these days? And who's developing it? Writers? Engineers? Support staff?

Employer's Market

I wondered if our interviewees would have anything to say about present-day employers that was "fit to print," but I didn't have to worry. All three remained very professional, polite, and restrained, even if their words did betray a few alarming trends.

Let's start with the profession and the position. It seems that over the last few years, the position of Tech Writer has become more technical in nature. Many employers are looking for lots of online experience (Web design, planning, coding). Kevin thinks part of the reason is the push to put print-based documents online (HTML, PDF, etc.). Joan suspects she'd do better if she had more Web construction skills. Thanks to the Y2K retraining push—not to mention the Web explosion of the late 1990s—there are a lot more people out there with those skillsets than there used to be.

Everyone agrees it's an employer's market; employers hold all the cards, or at least most of them. Unless you're in a cozy little niche (and if you are, let us know what it is!), you can't help but feel the effects. There are so many job applicants, employers can wait for someone who exactly matches their requirements.

Hearing back from employers has never been something to count on, but now it's so rare that those who bother to send rejection form letters look like humanitarians. As Joan puts it, "You send out resumes and it's the Beatles' song 'No Reply' most of the time." So far, she's received only one letter, and it said her skillset didn't meet the requirements. (At least they said they'd keep her on file.)

Another thing mentioned was skill creep. Employers are padding job descriptions with more and more skill requirements, yet they seem less willing to train workers on the job. That makes it harder to keep your skills current, according to Kevin. In IT, things move so fast, it's impossible to stay up on more than a few technologies at any one time. It can be overwhelming. Which skills do you choose? Nancy points out the risks of putting all your eggs in the skills basket. If you don't pick the right skill du jour, you could be out of luck—and out the price of the books or courses as well, not to mention your time. She

finds it frustrating that employers don't believe a qualified professional could learn a new tool quickly enough and don't respect the underlying skills and experience necessary to produce quality work.

So why aren't employers willing to train their employees? Maybe it's because their training budgets have disappeared or because their investors want two dollars a share instead of one. Maybe it's because they can pay a writer-who-programs less than a programmer-who-writes. Whatever the reason, jobs today tend to have a longer list of requirements and a lackluster salary to go with it.

Joan and Kevin both pointed out that even if you have all the skills for one of these super-employee descriptions, do you really want the pressure of doing two jobs for one paycheck? It's probably worth thinking about before signing on the dotted line.

Nancy is concerned that the whole technical writing profession will be devalued when hiring starts up again. She wonders if experienced people who haven't already left the field will be passed over in favor of newcomers with lower salary requirements.

Tuning into the Network

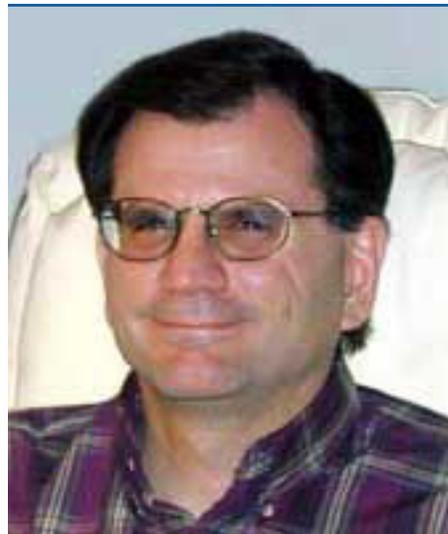
Employer's market or not, most of us don't have a choice about looking for work. How do our mild-mannered heroes hawk their wares? You guessed it: in a variety of ways.

As a freelancer, Nancy has never found work through any means other than networking. Someone tells her about an opportunity or tells a company about her. Her colleagues continue to be supportive, but they don't have many leads to work with.

One colleague offered her the chance to attend a meeting of the Washtenaw Referral Network as a guest. According to the group's Web site (<http://www.washtenawreferralnetwork.com/>), it is a "business and professional networking organization comprised of the area's premier service providers." More than thirty member companies provide "a source of highly competent, highly credible resources to the people, businesses, and corporations of Washtenaw County and southeast Michigan." Membership in this group is by invitation only, and

while it requires a significant commitment of time, energy, and dollars, its highly structured networking approach is very effective. This experience led Nancy to a company that uses a lot of freelancers and it would like to send some work her way—when it gets some. They have already referred others to her, however, and that has led to some exciting new possibilities. But those projects haven't materialized yet.

Nancy also found some different networking opportunities in the Ann Arbor area, including Network Downtown (<http://www.networkdowntown.com/>) and A3 Roots—The Ann Arbor Area - Ypsilanti Community Portal (<http://www.a3roots.com/a3roots>). Network Downtown ("business networking where the only speakers provide music"), according to its website, is "about making new contacts and getting to know existing contacts better in a fun atmosphere." A3 Roots is an online grassroots portal "connecting people, organizations, and businesses to each other through news, forums, and a calendar of events for art/culture, music, community activism and local entrepreneurial business."



Kevin Bell

Kevin has attended a few STC/SM lunches and meetings. He thinks it's helpful to talk to other members, gauge what the market is like, and get some ideas. He's also expanded his network to include other organizations such as the American Society for Training and Development (<http://www.astd.org/astd>). He's attended one ASTD meet-

ing in Ann Arbor and four or five in Toledo, and has received some leads. He even networked with a fellow JavaScript student and out-of-work Tech Writer at Washtenaw Community College. They talked each week, and searched together on Monster.com (<http://www.monster.com/>) and other job search engines such as CareerMatrix.com (<http://www.careermatrix.com/>).

In fact, Kevin seemed to be a bottomless font of networking ideas: attend professional organizations, sign up for listservs, read newspapers, talk with acquaintances (he has friends who run a temp agency). Send resumes out cold, too. Or do mini mass mailings to Human Resource departments. Hang out at the library and look at Chamber of Commerce membership directories for names of companies that look interesting. Peruse telephone books or investigate the US Department of Labor Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>). You'll find descriptions and codes, salaries, links to professional organizations, and employment trends and forecasts.

He says many people overlook friends and family. Keep an open mind and look at as many different resources as you can. Sometimes the help you need could be in your own back yard.

Joan was the only networking naysayer. She says she's lousy at it. She got a couple of job leads from friends but nothing has come of them yet. However, she's had better luck in her other profession of choice, teaching. Through a friend of a friend, she was encouraged to call a community college department chair and got an adjunct professor position for the fall.

She has attended job fairs, but found them pretty demoralizing. So many hopefuls showing up. She's also worked with a headhunter. She got a lead, but not a job. Another lead almost turned into a job, but not quite. Her successes have come most often through plain old job ads in the *Detroit News Sunday Edition*. "Strange, but true," she says.

Building a Portfolio

When applying for unemployment benefits, Kevin discovered the Michigan Talent Bank ([http://](http://www.michworks.org)

www.michworks.org. He posted his resume there and has had a few inquiries. He has not posted it at Monster.com, however. Other than MTB, he doesn't have an online Web site or portfolio. Some stress the need for one, and even burn them onto CDs for easy distribution, but he's uneasy about copyright issues. He uses mostly paper copies of his resume and some of his smaller writing samples. He takes the originals with him in a nice notebook but only sends out copies through the mail. He's even assembled some materials he's created for outside interests (articles on environmental issues, letters to the editor, and such). And don't forget to include articles written about you, he says. Even grad school writing samples, audio-visual scripts, research, examples of content organization skills, or newsletter articles should not be overlooked. Don't limit yourself. And don't take for granted your volunteer experiences.

As one might guess, Kevin has more than one resume. He lists all his competencies on one page, reserving the second page for employment experience and extracurricular highlights.

Neither Joan nor Nancy have gone the online posting route. Joan decided not to reinvent the wheel. Her sister had good luck with her resume, so Joan borrowed the format. It features a list of employers and bulleted items highlighting what she was responsible for and what she accomplished in each position. She, too, has more than one version.

Her current thought is you "have to get them in the cover letter. Smack 'em right between the eyes!" At least you may win the chance to talk to someone.

Exploring New Avenues

All three of our intrepid explorers are exploring new avenues. Each has questioned his or her career choice and is looking at alternatives including alternate careers they can fall back on.

Kevin is looking at other types of writing: business writing, newsletters, health care, non-profits, human services. He knows these may not pay as well as technical writing, but then again, a change just might be what the doctor ordered.

They each considered furthering their education, but

felt the cons outweighed the pros. Going to school full-time takes you out of the work force for a while, and you'll be older—and poorer—when you try to get back in. Does it make sense to pay for more training to get a job that will pay you less? And the older you get, the larger other obstacles loom, like taking out loans, for instance. When Joan quit work to go to school and change careers, she was a lot younger. Now it's a lot riskier. She'd never get the debt paid off. To switch careers, could mean two to four years of school at \$10,000 per year. With ten years or so left to work, does it make any sense?

Geographical factors are also a consideration in the job search. How far can you roam from aging parents and family? Locally, how much drive time can you commit to.

Not least of all the concerns is the good old "fear factor." Exploring new, non-technical, or even more-technical avenues can be a daunting experience, yet every one of our interviewees considered that exploration worth the risk.

Joan's broadened her search to "anything that pays and has benefits." She's been laid off just long enough to become "very comfortable at home," and would ideally like to work part-time somewhere. She is pursuing teaching (she is certified to teach high school math) and could substitute teach. She'd prefer tech writing, but if she could sub and afford benefits...

Nancy is on the lookout for another career. She's getting in on the ground floor of two new companies—one for management consulting and one for screenplay production. Trouble is, a depressed economy makes launching new ventures harder, too. It's a bit of a "Catch 22." And the struggle to survive doesn't leave much time for volunteering or working on long shots.

Precious Little Advice

Each of our subjects was concerned about sounding too negative, but all had positive advice to offer those who find themselves in similar straits.

Kevin encourages out-of-work colleagues to find other things to keep busy. Volunteer for things you're interested in, or consider temp work. Use the

opportunity to expand your life experience. Kevin is practicing what he preaches by trying to organize a satellite Sierra Club group in Lenawee county.

Joan counsels perseverance. She has cheerleaders on her side who gave her the same counsel: "It won't happen if you don't apply." "Armed with that slender piece of advice," she says, "I wander off to submit another application."

She also underscores the importance of financial planning. In fact, that's one bright spot in her experience. She worked very hard to put enough money in the bank to cover her expenses for a year. She's grateful that she hasn't had to use too much of her stash yet (because of unemployment benefits). Her advice is to try to save a year's salary. Then, when the time comes, be flexible and willing to simplify your life. Downtime in this economy can be a long time.

Joan also suggests that getting involved in trying to make things better is a great way to vent your frustrations. "Get educated about the political system," she says. "Get registered and vote. The only way people running this country will get the hint is if we have at least as many voters as lobbyists. Make sure your voice is heard by those who can do something about it. We're writers. Write letters!"

All agreed that one of the most important things you can do is just keep plugging away. As soon as you stop, you're out of the game and headed nowhere. Take what you can get for the short term. Be creative, and don't lose hope. As Nancy says, "You never know when something will come along." Many of her past jobs have come out of the blue. Reminding herself of this, she keeps hoping that it will happen again. Soon.

Spiritual Rewards for Non-Clerics

Not a cleric? Not even in a clerical position? (Sorry.) Doesn't matter. Lowly, out-of-work writers, too, can reap spiritual rewards. In fact, every one of our pencil-pushing pilgrims had something to say on this subject.

Kevin found that putting together his portfolio was a

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Networking Over Lunch

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- Maybe he should define his business as a list of discrete services, focusing on things like grammar dos and don'ts, how to craft engaging correspondence, or writing for the Web.
- Perhaps a focus on teaching English-as-second-language (ESL) employees to communicate clearly and effectively could be a big hit.

Mary Jo shared how she has targeted and tailored her Business Writing Refresher course to different companies in the past, depending on their interests and needs. She usually takes 10 to 15 students per class. Her courses includes reviewing individual writing samples and doing individual and group exercises. Most of her contracts have resulted through word of mouth, but she says she should advertise more. (Judging by her profusion of marketing suggestions for David, she has no lack of ideas.)

As 12:30 approached, we also discussed our preferred learning styles (formal classes versus sitting down with a book) and STC SIGs. But, alas, those subjects have to wait until our next meeting, because it was time to return to our corporate, contractor, and coach-in-training roles.

Everyone who's interested is invited, welcomed, and encouraged to attend the Ann Arbor area networking lunches. Why not attend the next one? <end/>

Making the Most of Your Membership

by Mary Jo David

You've paid to belong! That's one of the reasons the Society opted to password protect portions of the www.stc.org website. How many of you aren't taking advantage of being able to access the membership directory, the current salary survey, or past Intercom articles simply because you can't remember how to sign on to the STC website. Likewise, how many of you have written off the SIGs that you joined be-

STC/SM Ann Arbor Networking Lunch 2003-2004 Schedule

STC/SM members meet informally for lunch each month to share news and information. Gatherings start at 11:30 a.m., but arrivals are welcome at any time. Members, as well as interested technical communicators, are welcome to attend. R.S.V.P.'s are appreciated in order to secure sufficient table space.

Contact Kathy Carter at (734) 475-5865 (bluehoo@comcast.net) or Doug Howell at (734) 477-2857 (dhowell@bordersgroupinc.com) for more information or to be added to the e-mail reminder list. Networking lunch information is also available on the STC/SM Web site.

The following schedule was revised 16 Aug 2004. Dates and locations are subject to last-minute change.

Date	Host	Location
Tue, 28 Sep	Kathy	Gourmet Garden
Tue, 9 Nov	Doug	Applebee's (Green Rd.)
Thu, 13 Jan	Kathy	Shehan-Shah Indian
Tue, 8 Feb	Doug	Chili's Grill
Wed, 9 Mar	Kathy	California PizzaKitchen
Tue, 12 Apr	Doug	Zingerman's Roadhouse
Thu, 26 May	Kathy	Northside Grill
Tue, 26 Jul	Doug	Kabob Palace

cause you never heard any more about them after you sent in your \$5?

STC—Remember Me?

If you're one of those who would like to sign on but can't, following are some tips to help you make the most of that membership you or your company has paid for:

I can't remember my Member ID! If you can't remember your STC Member ID, look for one of your

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Networking & Learning Opportunities

September 28

STC/SM Ann Arbor Networking Lunch at Gourmet Garden. Host: Kathy Carter. E-mail Kathy at bluehoo@comcast.net to confirm.

September 29

Online seminar with Char James-Tanny, "Cascading Style Sheets: Creating Layouts without Tables (Part 2)." For a beginning/intermediate audience. See www.stc.org.

September 29-October 2

The Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE/PCS) will hold its International Professional Communication Conference at the Radisson Hotel Metrodome, Minneapolis, Minnesota. For more information, see www.ieeepcs.org.

September 30-October 2

Focusing on results: 2004 Performance-Based Instructional Systems Design (ISD) Conference. Chicago, IL • See www.ispi.org/isd2004.

October 6

Online seminar with Dana Chisnell/Amy Lee, "Communicating with Older Audiences." For the intermediate audience. See www.stc.org.

October 12-15

Project Management Institute 3-day seminar containing various workshops. Birmingham, MI • See www.pmi.org/prod/groups/public/documents/info/pdc_sw_ld_detroit04.asp.

October 13-16

The American Translators Association (ATA) will hold its annual conference at the Sheraton Centre Hotel in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For more information, please contact: ATA Phone: (703) 683-6100, Fax: (703) 683-6122, E-mail: conference@atanet.org, Web: www.atanet.org

October 20

Online seminar with Seth Maislin, "A Brief, Comprehensive Indexing Primer." For the beginning audience. See www.stc.org.

October 19-23

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) will hold its Annual

International Convention in Chicago, Illinois. For more information, please contact:

AECT Phone: (877) 677-AECT, Fax: (812) 335-7675, Web: www.aect.org.

October 21

STC/SM Chapter Program: "Fun and Fearless Public Speaking," with Linda Meloche from Dale Carnegie. Learn tips, tricks, and secrets to be more effective when speaking in front of groups in this fun and fast-paced session. Location: Borders Group, Ann Arbor MI.

October 21-23

The **American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)** will hold its 64th annual conference at the Adam's Mark Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri. For more information, please contact:

AMWA Phone: (301) 294-5303, Fax: (301) 294-9006, E-mail: amwa@amwa.org, Web: www.amwa.org.

October 21-24

The Intermountain Chapter STC will host the **2004 STC Region 5 Conference** at the Wyndham Hotel in Salt Lake City, Utah. The conference theme is "Ascending the Summit: A Technical Communication Expedition." For more information, please contact: Marj Hermansen-Eldard, Phone: (650) 842-9486, (801) 362-8955, (801) 225-4463, E-mail: meldard@legato.com, Web: www.intermountain-stc.org.

November 9

STC-SM's Ann Arbor Networking Lunch at Applebee's (Green Rd. location). Host: Doug Howell. E-mail Doug at doug@hawkswood.net to confirm.

November 9

STC/SM Chapter Program: A joint meeting on Usability is being planned with STC/SM, MOCHI (Michigan Ohio Computer-Human Interaction), and UPA-SM (Usability Professionals' Association of Southeastern Michigan). Topic: "Interaction Design for Complex Problem Solving: Getting the Work Right"

Do you work in software or web usability? Do you document hard-to-use or specialized products? Do you need to learn how to better visualize information for your own purposes or for your customers or clients? In this seminar, Barbara Mirel, professor at the University of Michigan's School of Information, focused on Human-Computer Interactions, will share her research

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into how to improve interaction design and complex visualization. Her talk will include theory and practice, illustrated by selected case studies. Mirel advocates a strategy for usability and design work that reflects the problems specific to complex systems, which are different from those for simpler applications. She will provide a framework for analyzing user work patterns and needs to create more useful and usable end products. Program Location: TBD.

November 10

Online seminar with Char James-Taney, "Introducing Windows 'Longhorn' Help." For all levels. See www.stc.org.

November 12-17

The American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIST) will hold its annual meeting, "Managing and Enhancing Information: Cultures and Conflicts" in Providence, Rhode Island. For more information, please contact: ASIST, Phone: (301) 495-0900, Fax: (301) 495-0810, E-mail: asis@asis.org, Web: www.asis.org.

December 8

Online seminar with Leah Guren, "Highlighting Hazards: Mastering Warnings and Error Messages." For all levels. See www.stc.org.

January 12, 2005

Online seminar with John Hedtke, "Preemptive Project Planning." For the intermediate/advanced audience. See www.stc.org.

January 13

STC/SM Ann Arbor Networking Lunch at Shehan-Shah Indian. Hostess: Kathy Carter. Email Kathy to confirm: bluehoo@comcast.net

January 26

Online seminar with Thomas White, "A Pound of Salt, A Pint of Blood—Getting the Most Out of Your Contractors to Ensure Project Success." For all levels. See www.stc.org.

CoolTools!

by Mary Jo David

There are major tools we use every day—Microsoft™ tools like Word, PowerPoint™, and FrontPage™ software...Adobe™ tools like FrameMaker™, Acrobat™, and InDesign™ software...Macromedia™ tools like Dreamweaver™ software...and the list goes on and on. Sometimes in the glare of these mammoth tools, we lose sight of some of the little tools out there, tools that might just simplify a single task, but an irritating task all the same.

Cool Tools! is a new column in TECHcomments. Here, we hope to present one or two useful mini tools each issue. In some cases, these are proven tools and in other cases, they're just tools we've heard about. Either way, they're tools that, potentially, can save our members time or aggravation—or both!

Mailbag Assistant

This little utility can prove to be a huge help to people who find themselves unable to part with old e-mails but overwhelmed with folders, like Inbox, SentMail, and even STCSM2004, that are out of control. This is especially true for those of us who don't have the advantage of working for companies that automatically archive e-mail for us. Mailbag Assistant enables you to "search, organize, analyze and archive your mountain of messages." It supports Outlook Express, Eudora, Netscape Messenger, Pegasus, and quite a few other e-mail programs.

I use Mailbag Assistant to archive my various e-mail folders once a month (when I'm really on top of things) or once a quarter (which is more often the case!). I archive to a different area on my hard drive and then I transfer the archive to a CD-ROM. I've had no trouble pulling up old archives from CD-ROM when I've needed to and that includes attachments.

Mailbag Assistant is a product of Fookes Software and is available for a 30-day evaluation. If you're like me, you'll find it well worth the \$34.95 it costs to register the program. For more information, go to <http://www.fookes.com/mailbag/index.php>.

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Meet the New Council

STC/SM Executive Council
1 Jul 2004–30 Jun 2005



Vice-President: Lanette Cornwell
The Right Writer, d/b/a
STC/SM Senior Member
STC/SM Newsletter Editor: 2 years
Judge, STC Technical Publications Competitions
BA, English, Adrian College
MS Home Economics, Ohio State University
Years in Technical Communication: 18
Years in STC: 10

President: Natalie A. Roelant
gNat's Media, d/b/a
STC/SM Vice-President: 1 year
STC/SM Programs Committee: 2 years
BS, Management, Davenport University
Years in Technical Communication: 6
Years in STC: 2-1/2



Secretary: Kendra Moe
Technical Writer, Creative Solutions
BS, Social Science, Michigan State University
MA (projected: 2004), Written Communication, Eastern Michigan University
Years in Technical Communication: 1-1/2
Years in STC: 1



Treasurer: Leslie Hipp
Information Developer, Compuware Corporation
AS (projected: 2005), Technical Writing,
Washtenaw Community College Certificate, Web Design,
Lawrence Technological University
Years in Technical Communication: 11
Years in STC: 7



Immediate Past President & Nominations Chair: Mary Jo David
Write Away Enterprises, d/b/a
STC/SM President: 1 year
STC/SM Vice-President: 1 year
STC/SM Senior Member
STC/SM Programs Committee: 5 years
STC/SM Publicity Manager (acting): 1 year
BA, Communication Studies, University of Detroit
Years in Technical Communication: 20
Years in STC: 18

From the Front Lines

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great source of encouragement. It is heartening to look back on your accomplishments and be reminded of your own genius. And even if you aren't a genius, you're unique. No one else has quite your mix of knowledge, skill, personality, and life experience. As projects, experiences, and faces come back to mind, you may even find yourself thankful for the experiences you have had.

During other slow periods, Nancy learned not to freak out—to relax a little and take the opportunity to do other things, including taking better care of herself. That becomes more challenging over time, but there's a message coming through, and it's a very personal one. For her, the hallmark of this experience is that she's seriously considering whether she's meant to do something else.

When all distractions cease and we're left with a telephone that won't ring, sooner or later we have to come to terms with that question. Searching for the answer has inspired some of the greatest written works in all of literature. So you can bet we'll be watching the careers of Joan, Nancy and Kevin. And expecting big things for each of them.

It's Your Turn

If any of our readers has a word of encouragement—or even better, a job lead or idea!—we know three people who would appreciate hearing from you. Here's their contact information at a glance.

Kevin Bell

Last position: Technical Writer

Currently seeking: Technical writing (mainly with companies that are developing software applications), training and development writing, newsletter writing (non-profits, human services), procedural writing (QRGs, user guides, etc.).

E-mail address: kfb@provide.net

Joan Johnson

Last position: Senior Technical Writer

Current position: Contract technical writer, putting together online help and manuals for a company that produces engineering quality assurance software.

Currently seeking: Technical writing; teaching

composition or math

E-mail address: jshana709@aol.com

Nancy Sock

Last position: Freelance technical writer and instructional designer

Currently seeking: Freelance writing, editing, online help development, information architecture, instructional design.

E-mail address: iriscomms@earthlink.net <end/>

From the Editor

by Mary Jo David

Welcome to our inaugural edition of the 2004-05 newsletter season! I volunteered as Newsletter Editor last year, when our previous editor, Lanette Cornwell, decided to run for Vice President of our chapter—and won. Lanette and her team have done a terrific job with *TECHcomments* for the last two years, and it will be tough filling her shoes.

So, what did we do? Well, we decided to start out on a real “up note” by bringing you an issue that focuses a bit of attention on our economy and the effects it's having on technical communicators in our chapter. I'm being facetious, of course. There's certainly not much that's upbeat about our economy and the ongoing job situation here. Still, I think we'd be doing a disservice to ignore reality in the pages of our newsletter, so in this issue, you'll hear from a few “experts” on what it's like to be looking for a job in this economy.

Speaking of “experts,” we have many experts and much expertise in our chapter, and we're going to do more to recognize some of you in our pages. Please take a minute to be introduced to two of our members (one is a student member) who are profiled in this edition.

I should also mention that this past year, Lanette submitted *TECHcomments* to the STC's Newsletter Competition, as a non-competitive entry.* We received some great feedback from the judges and I hope to implement some of their suggestions. One

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Making the Most...

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back issues of *Intercom*. The mailing label has your Member ID located immediately above your name. (If you're really organized, you can also find your Member ID on the member card that STC mailed you after you sent in your dues.)

I can't remember my Password! If you can't remember your password, the Society can help, but how it helps depends on whether you have your current e-mail address on file with the STC.

- If your current e-mail address is on file with STC, simply click the Password Help link that is available immediately below the Password field when you try to log into www.stc.org. A window will open asking you to type in your e-mail address. After you click Submit, the system will automatically process your request and, within a minute or so, you should receive an e-mail containing your password from STC.
- If your current e-mail address is not on file with STC, you'll have to phone the Society to get log-in assistance. Call (703) 522-4114. Membership questions should be directed to Ext. 200.

Hey SIGs—I'm Here...Where Are You?

So often, the feedback we're getting regarding SIGs is that members pay once to join a SIG, never hear from that SIG, and say "forget you" next time it's time to renew SIG membership. Admittedly, SIGs have become more and more visible online and less and less visible in your postal mail.

Occasionally, I still receive a printed Usability SIG newsletter, but far and away, the biggest benefit I receive from being a part of the Usability SIG is having access to its listserv. Admittedly, I can get to the website whether I'm a member or not; however, participation in the e-mail listserv is only available to Usability SIG members. I find the same is true for the Lone Writers SIG and the Contractors & Independent Consulting (CIC) SIG. In the four SIGs I joined, only the Marketing Communication SIG listserv has remained fairly inactive.

The biggest problem is finding out that these listservs are even available. Most STC listservs are set up such that members have to request to join the listserv—there's no automatic invitation. It's a definite problem, but it's a problem with a workaround. The best workaround is to go to the list of SIGs under the Membership drop-down at www.stc.org (http://www.stc.org/sig_links.asp) and look for the SIG(s) that you've joined. Click on the links that get you to the instructions for signing up for the listserv or to the name of someone who can help you. Do whatever it takes, because once you're on the listserv, there's a better-than-average chance you'll get your \$5 worth.

Hint: Even some of the listservs turn out to be disappointing, so before you renew your STC membership, ask around. Use our STC/SM listserv to find out what SIGs have been useful to people. Remember to ask specifically about the listservs—that's where you're going to get the most bang for your buck!. <end />

New Membership Categories

from STC International

Reprinted with permission from STC. See <http://www.stc.org/transformation/article9.asp>.

As you're aware, STC will introduce new membership categories this fall. The new categories vary in price and give members the option of joining multiple STC communities (chapters and SIGs). Membership dues have not been increased.

The STC board of directors recently approved the cost of member dues for four of the new categories. The board also decided how many STC communities members may select. The new categories will appear on dues renewal forms (to be mailed in November) and on new member applications for 2005. The board will establish the amount of community rebates for fiscal year 2006 at its annual meeting in May. (For those who have not yet filed for the 2005 rebate, the deadline is September 30th.)

Descriptions of the new membership categories follow. All dollar amounts are in USD. The costs and

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Member Profile: Sharon McDonnell

Interview by Maureen E.C. Moyer

Something new this way comes...

Beginning with this issue of your STC/SM newsletter, we are adding a new feature for your reading enjoyment: Member Profile. Many of us attend STC/SM programs and chat with others who attend, but never really get to know them well. Others we may know by face, but cannot recall his or her name. The time has arrived to become a little more familiar with our membership roll—those we may have met and those we haven't. In this issue we will profile member Sharon McDonnell.

As a Senior Analyst in the Medical Affairs Division of Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan, Sharon began her work for BCBSM as so many technical writers do—she was a contract employee. For two years Sharon worked with nine others to bring over 10,000 documents online and make them searchable by topics. This was an extensive undertaking as she had to learn not only XML but ArborText's Epic Editor as well. Sharon was eventually hired as a permanent employee and continues to write training materials and documentation, both online and hard copy, for application users as well as for employees learning what is necessary to keep an application maintained.

Sharon first earned an associate's degree in business from Washtenaw Community College and then attended Eastern Michigan University to become a computer programmer. After successfully completing several programming classes, Sharon ran into the

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Sharon
McDonnell



Member Profile

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math requirements at which point she was “down for the count” (something with which many of us may be intimately familiar). After changing majors, she received her bachelor’s of science in English with a concentration in technical communication, and a minor in general business. Sharon states that she is “happy I made the change,” and that the Information Systems education she received, as well as her work background, has been very helpful to her on the job as a technical communicator.

While still attending school, Sharon began her first job as assistant to STC/SM’s then Webmaster, Catherine Juon. This position gave her credit for an internship but also provided her with a plethora of useful information which she has carried onto other jobs. Sharon’s next volunteer role for STC/SM was as a program greeter, which she performed for several years. When a family illness compelled her to leave that post for a year, she jumped right back into the frying pan and volunteered to be the flyer coordinator for the 2003/2004 program year.

One fascinating aspect about Sharon that you may not be aware of is her vast work in genealogy. She has been tracing her family’s roots for approximately 10 years and has amassed a database of over 2200 individuals! Sharon has been able to go back as far as 1540 in Scotland on her father’s paternal grandmother’s side. This represents an extraordinary amount of work, especially when considering the task of contacting foreign countries for information and documentation. She has “joined forces” with her daughter, grandson, and a cousin to create a dynamic family website. Through this website she has been able to make further contacts, even as far as a third cousin to her husband, who contacted Sharon from Belfast, Northern Ireland! Check out this family dynasty at <http://www.fenrichfamily.com>. You will be pleasantly surprised and amazed. What a great job you have done, Sharon.

Sharon correlates her genealogy work into another riveting hobby—scrapbooking. Oh, not the scrapbooks of yore with hastily pasted photos and memorabilia attached to sticky pages. Today’s scrapbooking is far more sophisticated and artistic. She has compiled

two heritage scrapbooks, as well as one for each of her children, and a few others focusing on other events. She even produced one in which Sharon focuses on Sharon, including her accomplishments, children, and experiments in scrapbooking techniques.

We would like to thank Sharon for very kindly volunteering, once again, for STC/SM by sharing a brief bio on her education, career, and hobbies, so that all of our members may have a chance to get to know her on a more personal level. We hope you agree that our newsletter will be made that much more personal and interesting by including these profiles. Do not be at all surprised if you too get the call to “give it up” for your newsletter!

Maureen E.C. Moyer joined STC/SM as a student member. She is currently completing her final requirements for a bachelor’s degree in technical and professional communication at Lawrence Technological University and she recently began working as a proposal writer at STATPROBE, Inc.

Student Spotlight: Mary Caraballo

Interview by Elaine Wisniewski

Mary Caraballo is a full-time graduate student in Eastern Michigan University’s Masters Program in Written Communication with a concentration in Professional Writing. She expects to graduate in April 2005. Her undergraduate minor was Spanish.

Why did you decide to pursue graduate education in Technical Communication?

As I was walking out of the auditorium after my undergrad graduation, I didn’t feel as happy as I thought I would. I soon realized that I was not ready to end my academic career. So I went to the grad school the following day and chose a program. Since I already had two degrees in tech writing, I decided to get a grad degree in the same area.

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Student Spotlight

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Why at EMU?

EMU has one of the best reputations in Michigan as far as technical writing programs go. These types of programs are not that common (U of M, for example, does not have one) and I've loved writing ever since I was a child. Picking EMU was a no-brainer. Besides, I had already experienced the excellence in teaching and mentoring under the auspices of people like Dr. Nancy Allen, Dr. Ann Blakeslee, Dr. Melissa Motschall and Dr. Linda Adler-Kassner. What a group!

What were some projects from your coursework?

I created the 2002-2003 Annual Report for the dean of the College of Business at EMU. Everyone was so pleased when it came back from publication; so was I. I also thoroughly enjoyed working on a project that involved recreating a training manual for employees at a private airline company for de-icing/anti-icing aircraft. Very intense, very real, very educational.

Which classes/topics have influenced your thinking as a Technical Communicator?

I'm an editing nut/geek so anything that has had to do with editing has been a passion for me. The rhetoric class I took (ENG 524) was also very interesting in analyzing words, graphics, and how they interrelate.

How will a graduate degree help you in your career?

I created the 2002-2003 Annual Report for the College of Business as a graduate assistant. That has proven to be a very useful portfolio piece. Also, because this field requires experience, I was able to gain much of that experience while navigating through my academic career.

I have also worked for a Fortune 500 company (their headquarters) that canvassed me when they found my résumé on a Web site. One of the best facets, though, of getting a master's is in the networking and available opportunities that come along. Networking is where it's at when it comes to finding a job.



Mary Caraballo

After getting my undergrad degree, I was invited to teach advanced comp at a local community college. A master's would have given me the opportunity for full-time, had I gone that route.

What advice do you have for those considering Technical Communication?

Get experience while you are getting your education. Don't wait until you graduate to do your first project. Also, take some additional classes like a programming language or HTML so as to give you an edge over other writers who only write and/or edit documentation. You limit yourself

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Student Spotlight

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with that approach. As an undergrad, I was able to single-handedly hardcode a Web site for EMU's Office of Financial Aid, which was later converted with Dreamweaver, another project I had a hand in. All of these things look excellent on a résumé.

Also, join an organization and network, network, network. The Society for Technical Communication and the ASTD provide excellent opportunities for career moves and knowledgebase expansion.

What experiences can you share from STC?

As I mentioned earlier, this is a fantastic organization with helpful publications and many opportunities to get involved. I must admit that as a full-time grad student and mother of four (I also do volunteer Bible-education work on the weekends in the Spanish-speaking community), I have not availed myself of all of the benefits that the organization offers, but I do attend meetings whenever I can and I plan to volunteer to fill a position as a board member by this time next year after graduation.

STC offers many brief seminars that were crucial to some of the projects I worked on as a grad student. They also offer a discounted rate for student members so it's definitely worth joining.

Any academic/personal achievements in the field you'd like to share?

I've been able to maintain a 4.0 graduate GPA and I had a 3.97 undergrad GPA. I was also invited to present at the Graduate Research Fair and I've been awarded scholarships to attend several conferences like the PLAIN Language International and the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA). Both were extremely informative and I was able to meet new contacts, some of whom even offered me positions in other states.

Personally, I've been able to watch three of my four kids attend the college where I taught. Two were only 15 and 16 when they started and they will have a college degree before they reach the age of 18. The youngest will be starting in the same program by this time next year. Makes a mother proud!

Any other comments or advice?

While I look forward to graduating, I haven't discounted the idea of getting my PhD at EMU. Some professors have already spoken to me about pursuing the program in technology. I think I just like being on the campus. In any event, those students in the program need to review the list of the many job titles that are used in the field for tech communicators. You have no idea how many hats we can really wear.

Also, belonging to organizations like STC and ASTD let the world know that tech writers are invaluable members to any company looking to conduct business electronically or in hardcopy, locally or across the globe. At the heart of any strong, successful relationship are strong communication skills...and we have what it takes to make that happen.

Elaine Wisniewski is a senior member of STC. She is currently working toward a master's degree in written communication at Eastern Michigan University. She holds degrees from the University of Michigan in Industrial and Operations Engineering and works as a Research Ergonomist at Applied Safety and Ergonomics, Inc. in Ann Arbor.



Cool Tools!

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CrossEyes 3.0

If you're as old as I am, you probably had to remember making the transition from WordPerfect to Word somewhere along the line. Although it takes me back a ways, I still occasionally miss WordPerfect's Reveal Codes feature, which made it much easier to find an errant style tag that was throwing off a word, a heading, or a paragraph. Even now, a couple times a year, a gentleman in my building comes to me with a Word question I can't answer and he always leaves my office lamenting not being able to reveal codes in Word.

That might explain why a message about CrossEyes, by Levit & James, Inc., caught my eye on STC's Lone Writers SIG listserv back in May. Although I haven't used CrossEyes, I have read about it and it seems that it might do the trick for people trying to sort through style issues in Word by identifying exactly where styles are turned on and turned off. From what I've read, it may be more effective than Word's reveal formatting pane that was introduced in Word 2002. Based on the online readme file, the product works with versions as early as Word97 (SR-1) running under Windows 95 or NT 4.0 (SP-4) and later versions of Windows.

Read more about CrossEyes at <http://www.levitjames.com/crosseyes/CrossEyes.html>. According to the website, it's available for a free, 15-day evaluation. The price to register the software is \$49.99.

If you have a tool you've found useful, e-mail me at newsletter@stc-sm.org and tell me about it. If you've used one of the tools featured in the column, write and share your experiences—good and bad. Remember, the views and opinions in this column are the views and opinions of the writer only, and should not be considered a product endorsement by the STC/SM chapter. <end />

A Matter of Degrees

by Elaine Wisniewski

This year, TECHcomments will feature "A Matter of Degrees"—a section highlighting the area degree programs available to members of our chapter. Too impatient to wait for future issues of TECHcomments to find out what's available in our area? The www.stc.org website features an EDUCATION page including a database of academic programs in technical communication available around the country.

Eastern Michigan University—Degrees in Written Communication

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) offers three degree programs for students interested in pursuing the study of technical communication—a masters degree and two undergraduate degrees.

Master's in Professional Writing

The Master's in Written Communication with a concentration in Professional Writing seeks to prepare professional writers and scholars for their continually changing fields. Program members work to develop an exceptional learning environment in which EMU provides the latest in scholarship and skills with technology. Instructors expect students to apply their new knowledge through classroom and outreach opportunities involving client projects.

General goals of the program are to:

- Help students develop communication skills for various professional contexts
- Support students' development as researchers in the field
- Integrate students into the communities of their area of specialization, outside the confines of the university setting

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A Matter of Degrees

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- Help students find ways to connect the scholarship in the field to their own professional experiences as professional communicators

Bachelors in Technical Communication

The Technical Communication program, one component of Written Communication, was developed to prepare students for careers in the many industries that include technological or scientific divisions or products. The program is committed to a general goal of blending theory and practice.

The faculty believe that theoretical grounding is the most portable part of what students can learn in the curriculum since it provides them with strategies to apply to a multitude of communication settings and problems. By coupling this grounding with the practice of special writing and technology skills that technical communicators require, this program prepares students who are well equipped to enter the job market.

During their coursework, students have the opportunity to adapt and apply the theories and skills they learn by working with clients on projects that take them outside the classroom and into workplace settings.

Working from lists developed by professionals in the field and by the Society for Technical Communication, the faculty in the Technical Communication program have developed an overall goal—to help students develop writing strategies and professional experience through practical workplace projects—as well as a set of more specific goals. The experiences in the program are designed to promote integral connections between students' development as

writers and their understandings of their future roles as communicators in the workplace.

Bachelors in Professional Writing

The Professional Writing program was developed to provide a program that would prepare students with excellent writing strategies and skills that were not focused on particular writing professions. The program prepares students for positions in professional writing such as editing, publishing, marketing, and freelancing.

Since students in the program have a variety of professional aspirations, the program's primary goal is to ground students in rhetorical theory and in composing and editing skills. These will enable students to assess, understand, and meet the needs of a number of audiences. Students also learn and practice writing skills for both paper and digital documents. They receive training in a variety of fields that will impact their professional work.

The program strives to give students professional experience through practical workplace projects completed in courses. The program also promotes integral connections between students' development as writers and their understandings of the roles of professional writers in the workplace.

For more information on EMU's programs in written communication, check out the website <http://www.emich.edu/public/english/index.html> or contact Nancy Allen, Director of Writing Programs, nallen@emich.edu. <end />

Next Issue: Degree Programs at Lawrence Technological University (LTU)

For the latest in STC/SM Job Postings,
go to www.stc-sm.org.
Click Employment.

From the Editor

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judge commented that we used too many exclamation points in the newsletter. I immediately blamed myself for that, since I was chapter president at the time and thus responsible for submitting a column to the newsletter for each edition. You see, I have this tendency to get a little too excited when I write! Ooops...there I go again! (Yikes...that's two...now three!)

Well, I'm excited about this opportunity to work on the chapter newsletter. But, I'm even more excited to have a great team helping out. Did I say "helping." Actually, the team did the bulk of the work for this edition. If it hadn't been for me holding up the show, this issue would have actually gone out this summer. Oh well—there's always next summer.

So, on behalf of Emily, Doug, Mo, and Elaine—not to mention Beth, who's keeping an eye on things from California, just waiting for that inevitable return to her roots in Michigan—I'd like to welcome those who are new to reading *TECHcomments* and welcome back those who are regular readers. If you have any comments or suggestions, please don't hesitate to send them to newsletter@stc-sm.org.

Mary Jo David
Managing Editor

* *TECHcomments* was submitted as a non-competitive entry because we produce only five issues a year. Newsletters with six or more editions annually can be entered as competitive entries.

New Membership Categories

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benefits of these categories are listed below. For a table of Membership Categories, see: <http://www.stc.org/transformation/memberCategories.pdf>

"Classic" Membership

Publications: Paper copies of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*, and access to the online versions.
Communities: Members choose between 1 chapter and 1 SIG, or 3 SIGs; additional SIGs available for \$5 each; additional chapters for \$10 each.
Voting Privileges: Yes
Cost (in USD) - U.S. members: \$145.00
Canadian members: \$145.00 + \$15 postage
Overseas members: \$145.00 + \$35 postage
Retired members*: \$72.50

* To qualify, an individual must be retired and have been an STC member for at least 10 years. Retired members are not counted in the calculation of chapter rebate amounts.

"Limited" Membership

Publications: Paper copies of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*, and access to the online versions.
Communities: None.
Voting Privileges : Yes
Cost (in USD) - U.S. members: \$125.00
Canadian members: \$125.00 + \$15 postage
Overseas members: \$125.00 + \$35 postage

E-Membership

Publications: Online access to *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*. No paper copies.
Communities: Members choose between 1 chapter and 1 SIG, or 3 SIGs; additional SIGs available for \$5 each; additional chapters for \$10 each.
Voting Privileges: Yes
Cost (in USD) - U.S. members: \$135.00
Canadian members: \$135.00
Overseas members: \$135.00

Student

Publications: Online access to *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*. No paper copies.
Communities: One student chapter and one professional chapter; SIGs available at no cost; additional chapters for \$10 each.
Voting Privileges: No
Cost (in USD) - U.S. members: \$50.00
Canadian members: \$50.00
Overseas members: \$50.00

Corporate Membership

To allow for further study, the board has postponed a vote on the costs and benefits of this category.

<end />