Inside This Issue

Mark Your Calendars

Our first meeting of the new year will be held on January 25, at Lawrence Technological University. Professor Corinne Stavish and Tim Kiernan will be talking about "Storytelling and Podcasting—New Media for Technical Communication." More information will be available soon at www.stc-sm.org.

Letter From the Editor
by Christine Pellar-Kosbar, President and Editor

Welcome to the autumn issue of TECH*comments*, the STC/SM newsletter. This autumn we've been focusing on the future: future technologies and the future of STC.

As you may know, STC is going through a transition. Right now, within the STC, we're debating and discussing the topics of "what constitutes a community?" and "how can chapters be more useful to members?" If you have an opinion, now would be a great time to have your voice heard—either through the listserv (http://www.stc-sm.org/listserv.htm) or by attending the November 14 meeting at AAA in Dearborn. Susan Burton, STC International's new executive director, will be speaking and offering a Q-and-A session about the Society.

At STC/SM, we've transitioned over the past two years to holding programs at donated venues—company meeting rooms. We'd love to know what you think of that transition. Do you feel that programs are in locations that are convenient to you? Do you think that having several locations at the same time (with a remote speaker) might serve you better? Do you think a daytime Webcast would be useful? We've also experimented with different food options and will be experimenting more in the future—do you have a preference about food served at programs?

The listserv is one place where you can voice any opinions you have, but you can also send an email to me (president@stc-sm.org or newsletter@stc-sm.org) or to any of the council members (http://www.stc-sm.org/contactUs.htm). Another way to voice your opinion is to come to the November 14 meeting in Dearborn. This chance to speak to and hear from the person at the top is one that might not happen again.

You're invited.

Hope to see you there.

Cool Tools
by Mary Jo David, Programs Co-chair

After a bit of a dry spell, it's good to be back. I've been trying to keep track of some "cool tools" as I happen to hear about them, hoping I'd have an opportunity to share them in this column. Now, here we are.

The tools I'm writing about in this edition are, for the most part, Web links that I thought would be quite useful for some of our writing needs. I can't say I've played with them extensively. Mainly, I've just read about them and then decided to share them with you.

Help for Budding Bloggers

Chances are, if you're reading this newsletter, you love to write. Well, have you ever considered starting your own blog? Blogs have certainly become quite popular and for a variety of reasons. Some tout products. Others tout personal views on everything from *How We Should End the War* to *What I Think About Toenail Clippers*. No, this column is not about how to start a blog or where to host a blog. For that info, I strongly suggest you google "starting a blog" and then let us know where we can find your finished product after you've used the best of all the tips you have found.

No, in this case, I just wanted to address one of the tips I found when I followed my own googling advice. It seemed many of the sites I went to had one tip in common: use an existing template for your blog rather than trying to create your own. Sites like blogger.com have templates for you to use, thank goodness, but I also happened upon the following site with some nice themes you can download: http://www.bloggingthemes.com/. I want to share it in case there are any budding bloggers out there.

September Program Recap
by Anthony Viviano, Programs Co-chair

What does it mean to technical communicators that Web 2.0 has firmly established itself on the Internet landscape? How can we as professional content creators survive in a world of user-generated content?

On September 28, Bill Hart-Davidson, MSU's Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) codirector, presented his talk, "Web 2.0: What Technical Communicators Should Know As Users Become Content Producers." The talk discussed how we can rely on our information design concepts and skills to survive in the world of Web 2.0.

Bill answered three key questions:

- What is Web 2.0?
- How might it change the way we do business?
- What role might technical communicators play in this change?

Bowling Green offers Graduate Certificate in International Scientific and Technical Communication

Bowling Green State University is now offering a Graduate Certificate in International Scientific and Technical Communication. This program is designed for adults who have a bachelor's degree in any field and who wish to enhance their written workplace communication effectiveness, especially when they communicate technical information to international readers. The certificate program is online, so you can control study time and work at your own pace. The graduate credit you receive can also be applied to a master's degree in Scientific and Technical Communication.

For more information, visit online.bgsu.edu.

Student Spotlight: Lisa Grimble Pursues Master's Degree in Technical Communication

by Elaine Wisniewski

Lisa Grimble is a master's student in the Written Communications-Professional Writing Program at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). Lisa has been a full-time student for the past two and a half years (six credits per term) and has also been a graduate assistant in EMU's Writing Center. She expects to graduate in December 2006 as she is currently finishing her final course in the program. Her undergraduate degree, in communications, is from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Why did you decide to pursue your graduate education in technical communication?

I had been working in purchasing for roughly 10 years and not enjoying it anymore. I wanted to go back and add to the knowledge/experience from my undergraduate degree and hopefully restart my career doing something I know that I like: writing.

Why did you decide to attend EMU?

I chose EMU because their program seemed to fit my needs the best. Also, after applying, a meeting with the program coordinator (Nancy Allen) convinced me that EMU's program, with its relatively small number of students and faculty, would give me the individualized attention that I felt I needed.

Which classes have influenced your thinking as a technical communicator?

The course "Rhetoric of Science and Technology" was the most influential course. Although this was a tough class (full of theory), it gave me a good base to build upon and showed me how to practically apply theory in everyday life and work.

Also, the courses "Visual Rhetoric" and "Media Ecology" were influential. Both of these courses have served as eye openers; "Visual Rhetoric" expanded my view of what communication and technical writing are while "Media Ecology" is beginning to show me how the technology and media we use to communicate (as writers or the general public) really do impact our environment.

What are some example projects from your coursework that you are particularly proud of?

I am most proud of a paper that I wrote on visual discourse communities for my "Visual Rhetoric" course in which I analyzed the visual communication within McDonald's restaurants. My paper was selected as part of a panel discussion for the 2006 Conference on College Composition and Communication in Chicago.

I also presented a paper analyzing the rhetorical strategies employed when information originally published for a professional/scientific journal is rewritten for the popular press at EMU's 2005 Graduate Research Fair.

STC Council Member Spotlight: Kendra Mallon
by Elaine Wisniewski

Kendra Mallon is the secretary of the STC/SM and has been a member of STC for the past four years. She holds an MA in written communications from Eastern Michigan University and a BS in social science from Michigan State University

Why did you decide to become a council member?

I wanted to get more involved with the organization and meet other technical communication professionals in the area since I was quite new to the profession. I thought the secretary position was a good fit for my skills and a great way for me to participate.

What are your goals for your position for the upcoming year?

My position-related goal for this year is to do my part to ensure that everyone on the council is on the same page by making sure they get reports in on time, receive the meeting minutes, and know their to-do items (exciting stuff!). As far as the chapter goes, I'd like to help us reach out to more people and get more of our members involved.

Why did you decide to pursue technical communication as a career?

I was working as a writer but found that I wanted something more involved and challenging. I started researching graduate-level writing programs and found the Written Communications Program at Eastern. After meeting with people involved in the program and learning more about technical communication, I thought the program and the profession were a perfect fit for me—a healthy balance of creativity and technical skills.

Where are you currently employed?

I work for a network security software company called Arbor Networks in Ann Arbor.

What are your job activities?

I prepare written documentation and online Help for one of our products, Peakflow X.

What are some example projects that you are particularly proud of?

In my previous position, I created the online Help and hardcopy documentation for a new product. It was the first Help project that I created from scratch. In my current position, I helped to convert our Help from unstructured FrameMaker to structured FrameMaker—in the midst of preparing for a release. It was a big

September Program Recap (cont.)

We technical communicators were addressed as "knowledge workers," described as "people responsible for changing, for the better, not merely the means by which we work but the ends towards which we work."

After defining Web 2.0 and its features (folksonomies, open APIs, and social network services), Bill went on to explain that this change in technology creates a shift in user power. Companies now have an outside design life cycle that competes with their own. This user-centered cycle must be addressed, and the technical communicators' expertise is critical.

So, what skills do we have that are critical in the Web 2.0 life cycle? As researchers, we discover emerging user patterns. We can also "curate" content. And, of course, we can document and standardize for our company's use.

After this inspiring talk, Bill stuck around and answered questions. He also made his – PowerPoint slides available. Feel free to download them from http://www.wide.msu.edu/web20.

Note from the program manager: I'm very excited by some the presentations we're working on for this year. Coming up on November 14, we have Susan Burton, STC's executive director, presenting on the topic "Where is STC Going?" Toward the end of January, we'll step outside the document box and discuss new mediums for communicating technically. We've also reduced the fees, especially for students. Hope to see you soon!

Upcoming Event From the Western Shores STC

The Western Shores STC Chapter meeting for November is Wednesday, November 15 at the Kalamazoo Club Car.

Speed Networking
Full registration information can be found at:

www.wms-stc.org/events.htm

STC/SM Volunteer Opportunities

If any of the following volunteer opportunities sound intriguing to you, please send an email message to nominations@stc-sm.org. An inquiry is not a commitment, and duties/tasks are always negotiable.

Hosts for Detroit/Suburb Networking Events

Make arrangements with a Detroit area restaurant, let people know the event is happening, greet people at the event, and make them feel welcome.

Hosts for Ann Arbor Networking Events

Make arrangements with an Ann Arbor area restaurant, let people know the event is happening, greet people at the event, and make them feel welcome.

Membership Chair

Welcome new members with a letter and offer of support.

ASTD Upcoming Event

ASTD (the Association of Training and Development) hosts monthly meetings at Washtenaw Community College. Registration information can be found at:
www.astdannarbor.org/programs.html

Their next meeting is on December 7, 2006 and will cover "Improving Human Performance."

Chapter Competition Dry Run
by Laura Allen, Professional Liaison

The STC/SM Chapter is holding formal chapter competitions starting in the fall of 2007. As part of the preparation, we are holding a Competition Dry Run—a chance for everyone interested to experience what being involved in competitions entails.

How can you be involved? You can enter one or more projects in the three available entry categories. Or perhaps you'll stretch your muscles judging entries. Maybe serving on the competitions committee is more your style.

As an **entrant**, you'll learn what's involved in entering the competitions:

✓ choosing which work to enter

✓ filling out entry forms

✓ writing project descriptions

✓ refining work for resubmission to formal chapter competitions in fall 2007

As a **judge**, you'll experience what's involved in evaluating others' work:

✓ learning the judging criteria

✓ filling out judging forms

✓ judging different types of submissions

As a **committee member**, you'll become familiar with the possible committee roles:

✓ assistant coordinator for competitions

✓ coordinators for judge recruitment, entry drop-off venues, entries drop-off, receipt and verification, and judging and awards

✓ roles that are less formal and behind the scenes

Anyone can be a judge or enter the competitions. You don't have to be a member of STC.

You may enter, as an individual or on behalf of a colleague or subordinate, in one or all three of the following **categories:**

- **Technical Publications**
- **Online Communication**
- **Technical Art**

We will accept any work produced between January 1, 2005, and January 1, 2007 (between September 1, 2005, and September 1, 2007, if you plan on resubmitting your entry in the formal competitions). Drop-off locations for entries are being planned. No entry fee will be charged for the Dry Run, and informal chapter awards will be given.

Submissions will be accepted between January 8, 2007, and February 19, 2007 (tentatively). A complete Dry Run timeline will be posted on the chapter Web site as well as detailed informational packages for entrants and judges.

Being involved in competitions is a fairly new yet exciting experience for all of us. By holding the Dry Run, we hope to make the experience a little more familiar. Feel free to contact the professional liaison (profliaison@stc-sm.org) with any questions or feedback or to volunteer.

Student Spotlight: Lisa Grimble Pursues Master's Degree in Technical Communication (cont.)

Have you had any internships in technical communication?

Yes. I just completed a three-and-a-half month internship at TRW Automotive where I designed, compiled, wrote, and edited TRW's Global Product Plan. This plan is now used both as a reference guide and planning aid by the TRW program management personnel worldwide.

Also, as a graduate assistant for EMU's Writing Center, I have had a lot of experience helping undergraduate students at EMU improve their writing.

How will a graduate degree help you in your career?

Hopefully, having a graduate degree in technical communication will show my future employers that I have the current knowledge (theoretical and practical) needed to succeed.

Membership Renewal

The 2007 membership renewal process has begun. All renewals are due to the STC office by **January 1, 2007**.

STC International will be sending the renewal letter and forms in the mail over the next several weeks, but to eliminate the hassle of postage and wait time, you can renew online now at https://www.stc.org/duesrenewal/stcLogin.aspx.

Renew now! If you have any questions on the status of your membership, please contact Cara Gardner (cara@stc.org), Ella Carlson (ella@stc.org), or Mary Kabza (mary@stc.org).

Cool Tools (cont.)

Cascading Style Sheets

Anthony Viviano (new co-chair of the Programs Committee) has been trying to search out someone to speak to our chapter about cascading style sheets (CSS). If you are that person or know of someone, please let us know by writing to anthony.viviano@gmail.com or me at the address mentioned at the end of this column. Meanwhile, I thought I'd do some hunting around to find some information for those interested in learning more about CSS.

According to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), "Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) is a simple mechanism for adding style (e.g., fonts, colors, spacing) to Web documents."

You can learn about CSS through a plethora of links on the W3C site at: http://www.w3.org/Style/CSS/learning. I also happened upon the following site, which has some simple CSS layouts and provides you with the opportunity to view the CSS code for these layouts: http://www.bluerobot.com/web/layouts/. And if these are too simplistic for you and you have a creative bent, how about this site: http://www.csszengarden.com/, which explains the importance of CSS and provides some beautiful page designs when you click on the samples listed on the right side.

It's All Greek to Me!

And lastly, how often have you been playing with a layout, and you just want some "junk text" to throw into the layout to see how it will work? Designers often plug in "greeked text" for this purpose, and most high-end design layout tools provide an ability to plug in greeked text when you're designing a new layout. For those of us who aren't using the design tools (for example, InDesign or Quark) but would like to plug greeked text into a sample of a page or Web site we're laying out, the following sites might be helpful. Try either of these sites for generating greeked text (and some other creative verbiage) for your next project:

http://www.duckisland.com/GreekMachine.asp

http://www.lorem-ipsum.info/generator3

Hope you have fun with the above, and don't forget, if you know of a cool tool, write me and let me know so we can consider sharing it with others through this column. You can reach me at maryjo@writeawayent.com.

October 2006 Program Recap
by Mary Jo David, Programs Co-chair

"What's Up, eDoc?" was presented by Neil Perlin, owner and principal consultant of Hyper/Word Services in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. A long-time technical communication professional, Perlin presented remotely from Tewksbury on October 19 to an STC/SM audience gathered at Borders Group headquarters in Ann Arbor.

Perlin's extensive background developing online Help dates back to 1985. He is recognized as an expert in Windows Help and online documentation design and development, and he's well versed in WinHelp, HTML-based Helps, and XML.

Much of his presentation for STC/SM focused on the current status of tools in the online Help world. In his estimation (and there were many heads nodding as he presented his take), WinHelp is dead, Microsoft's HTML Help (MS Help format) is on its way out, and RoboHelp has an uncertain future that may or may not include Adobe RoboHelp X6.

Perlin was careful to make the distinction that XML is not a tool but, rather, a meta language, and he pointed out that, while it had a bit of a slow beginning, editors are now becoming available that are making it easier to tackle XML. He talked briefly about how one of the benefits of XML is also one of its biggest challenges: defining and enforcing syntax rules that promote content structure and standardization.

As for tools that support XML editing, Perlin mentioned the very early Veritas tool for XML, XMetal, Robohelp (which Perlin says supports XML in a 3-year-old fashion), Epic, and newer tools like MadCap Flare and an XML plug-in for Microsoft Word called Xpress Author (by in.vision). He also discussed how the need for online documentation doesn't just mean "online Help" but, also, "visual Help" like demos and interactive simulations, and he specifically pointed out the challenges that face technical communicators who have to write for mobile devices.

Perlin mentioned a trend toward personalization, which, when combined with single-sourcing, has the potential to produce individualized Help—in other words, Help files that can be generated differently, depending on if you are Person A, Person B, and so on. He went on to discuss the challenges of thinking ahead to user-created Help and threw in general examples like blogs and wikis and the specific example of Wikipedia.

During his wrap-up, Perlin said he couldn't claim to know which technologies will take off and which ones won't, and he doubts anyone else can either. According to Perlin, more important than trying to figure out the answer to that question is spending time to determine your company's strategic direction, its documentation goals, trends in the industry, and, of course, focusing on structure and standards.

Editor's note: If you're interested in reviewing Neil's slideshow, send an email message to programs@stc-sm.org.

STC Council Member Spotlight: Kendra Mallon (cont.)

How has being a member of STC helped you with your career?

It has helped me to network and learn about all the different areas of technical communication. The world of TC in southeastern Michigan is pretty small. It's nice to know people and be a part of that community. I also get a good grasp of what skills are important and what I need to keep up on, since our field is always evolving.

What advice do you have for students as they are entering the field of technical communication?

I would definitely recommend joining your local STC chapter and helping on a committee or serving as a council member. It's such a great way to meet people, network, and learn what skills are important from the people who hire technical communication professionals. I also recommend getting as much real-world experience as possible through internships, volunteer projects, and school projects—anything that highlights your writing skills and ability to transform technical information into valuable information for users.

Any career/academic/personal achievements in the tech comm field that you'd like to share?

I just got married this September! (That's obviously a personal achievement.)

Any other comments you'd like to include?

This is my third year as secretary of STC/SM, and it has really been a rewarding experience. I have met some fabulous people and learned so much. I hope that I can always be involved in the organization in some way.

Remote Seminars From STC International

STC International sponsors remote seminars. Full seminar descriptions and registration information can be found at: http://stc.webex.com/

November 22, 2006
Selling Technical Communication Services-Both Inside and Outside Your Organization
Presenter(s): Robert Dianetti
Level: Intermediate/Advanced

December 6, 2006
Creating Training That Sticks Presenter(s): Maggie Haenel
Level: Beginner/Intermediate

STC Scholarships

STC scholarships are available each year to qualified technical communication students.

Overview

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

Awards of $1,500 will be granted for academic year 2007-2008. Two awards are granted to graduate students and two to undergraduates.

Purpose

The purpose of an STC scholarship is to assist students who are pursuing established degree programs in some aspect of technical communication.

Eligibility

Applicants must have completed at least one year of postsecondary education.

Applicants must be full-time students. They may be either graduate students working toward a master's or doctor's degree or undergraduate students working toward a bachelor's degree.

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

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

Awards

Four awards of $1,500 each will be granted toward school tuition and expenses. Two awards are granted to graduate students and two to undergraduates. Awards are for the academic year (September - June).

Schedule

Applications must be received by February 15 of the year for which the scholarship is needed.

Graduate students must have notified the committee of acceptance in a graduate program by March 20. (Students enrolling in a graduate program may not know their status by February 15. They will be evaluated as accepted students, but their eligibility is contingent upon acceptance and notification by March 20.)

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

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office:

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

The application is also available online at the STC Web site:

http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01_national.asp

November Program: The Future of STC

Featuring:
Susan Burton, STC's new executive Director and ASAE-certified association executive

Description:
Join us November 14, 2006 to discuss the future of STC.

Susan Burton will talk about the latest efforts by the Board of Directors and office staff to move the Society into the future. STC has identified six strategic objectives, and a small army of volunteers has stepped forward to help us reach those objectives. Find out what these efforts will mean to you.

Particulars:

Date:	Tuesday, November 14
Time:	Hors d'oeuvres: 6:30 p.m. – 7 p.m. Chapter Program: 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Location:	AAA 1 Auto Club Dr. Dearborn, MI 48126 Room: Auditorium. Sign in at the security desk. You will receive a AAA name tag. Parking: There is a parking lot in front of the building. Go in the main door to check in with security.
Price:	Registration $25– Nonmembers $20– STC Members $17– Student Nonmembers $15– Student Members

Registration:
Please register by email at register@stc-sm.org (be sure to mail in your payment as well) or by mail at:

STC-SM
P.O. Box 1289
Ann Arbor, MI 48106