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Letter From the Editor

by Christine Pellar-Kosbar

Happy winter! So far, so good; we're already past the shortest day of the year and haven't been blasted by snow and ice. World Usability Day (WUD) in Lansing was tremendously informative and fun, and Susan Burton's talk about the future of STC was inspirational.

Upcoming events for STC/SM include:

- Downtown Detroit Networking Lunches
- The Internet User Experience
- Our January meeting: Storytelling and Podcasting-New Media for Technical Communication
- Writing Contest Dry Run

Look for STC/SM-Michigan Usability Professionals' Association (MIUPA) lunchtime networking meetings to start in late January in downtown Detroit. If you work in or near downtown, schedule the 11th as the day to go to Pizza Papalis at 553 Monroe St. in Detroit for lunch and conversation.

STC/SM is once again co-sponsoring the Internet User Experience 2007, February 19 through 22, at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor. This 4-day event features tutorials and presentations about usability, including Web site evaluations by Dave Mitropoulos-Rundus, which I highly recommend. I saw Dave conduct site evaluations at WUD, and I was able to bring back lists of great suggestions just as my organization was about to revamp our site. Dave demonstrated how placement and organization of site elements really make a site easier and more fun to use and contrasted sites to show how elements work together (or fail to work together) to create a flow. The Internet User Experience includes 2 days of presentations and an additional 2 days of tutorials. STC members will receive a discount when you register, so check out their Web site: <http://www.internetuserexperience.biz/index.html>.

Our January meeting features Timothy Keirnan, co-founder of MIUPA, talking about Podcasting, and Professor Corinne Stavish from Lawrence Tech talking about storytelling. Tim Keirnan was also at WUD with his partner Tom Brinck, talking about his podcast "Design Critique: Products for People." Tim and Tom were both entertaining and enlightening. (For those unfamiliar with podcasting, it's much like iTunes in that you can download a podcast, an MP3 file usually, to listen to [or watch]. However, podcasts can include music, lectures, discussions—any audio, video, images, or text.) The meeting takes place at Lawrence Tech on Thursday, January 25. Register for the meeting at our Web site: www.stc-sm.org

The STC/SM Writing Competition Chapter Dry Run will begin soon. Submissions will be accepted between January 8 and February 19. Contact Laura Allen, professional liaison, at profliaison@stc-sm.org, with any questions or feedback or to volunteer.

Happy New Year!

Cool Tools

iTools.com Helps Clean Your Desktop

by Mary Jo David, Programs Co-chair

How clean is your desktop?

I know it's a personal question, and those who know me well know that if we're talking about the desk in my office, I'd be in trouble. But luckily I'm referring to your computer's desktop. This issue of "Cool Tools" focuses on a single site that offers an efficient portal into a number of frequently used sites that would be helpful to writers. The site is iTools.com; this one site opens a homepage that provides you with helpful online tools—ready to be put to use directly from the iTools homepage. Think of it as a way to "single source" your desktop tools.

For example, if you need to check the definition of a word, open iTools.com and type the word into the "Dictionary" area under **LANGUAGE TOOLS**.

If you want to "Google" something, open itools.com and type the word(s) into the "Web Search" area under **SEARCH TOOLS**. Need to translate some text, open iTools.com, and type the word or phrase into the "Text Translator" area

under **LANGUAGE TOOLS**, then select the languages you're translating from and to... *C'est cela facile!* (It's that easy!).

There are plenty of other tool types displayed on the main page at iTools.com, but if you prefer a different tool—for example, if you want to use MetaCrawler instead of Google to search for a term—simply select the type of tool (in this case, Search Tools) from the navigation bar on the left side of the screen, and you'll be presented with many more tool choices.

The only trouble I've had using iTools is the "Biography" tool under **RESEARCH TOOLS**. I've yet to retrieve a biography successfully with this tool; however, when I type a name into the "Biography" area under **RESEARCH TOOLS**, iTools does take me to biography.com to display an error message; from there I can easily type the name of the person I'm looking for, and it works just fine.

If your new year's resolution is to clean up your desktop, might I suggest adding a single iTools shortcut so you can then sweep many of the other shortcut icons off your screen.

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.

Standard iTools Categories

- Search Tools
- Language Tools
- Research Tools

iTools Categories From the Left Navigation Bar

- Search Tools
- Language Tools
- Research Tools
- Financial Tools
- Map Tools
- Internet Tools
- Find People

Techcomments

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

Managing Editor:
Christine Pellar-Kosbar

Assistant Editor:
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Elaine Wisniewski, Mary Jo David,
Laura Allen

Techcomments is published four times a year: Nov/Dec, Jan/Feb, Mar/April, May/June. The deadline for submissions is the 20th of the month preceding publication.

Reprints are permitted provided you give credit and send a copy of your publication to the managing editor. Unless otherwise noted, copyrights for all newsletter articles belong to the authors.

Deadline for submissions: February 20, 2006 for the March/April issue of Techcomments. Please email submissions to newsletter@stc-sm.org.

Upcoming Event From the West Michigan Shores STC

The West Michigan Shores STC Chapter meeting for January will take place in Kalamazoo on Tuesday, January 16.

The topic will be "Project Estimating."

Full registration information is at www.wms-stc.org/events.htm

STC/SM Leadership 2006-2007 Executive Council

President

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Member Spotlight: Andrea Frazier

by Elaine Wisniewski

Andrea Frazier has been a member of STC for 5 years. She holds two bachelor's degrees, one in biological science from Michigan State University and another in written communication-technical communication from Eastern Michigan University.

Why did you decide to join STC?

I decided to change careers about 10 years ago and become a technical writer. After I finished my degree, I wanted to stay in touch with the professionals, fellow students, and instructors who helped me make that transition. Several of my co-workers also belong to STC. My company reimburses for professional memberships, so that removes one barrier to maintaining a membership.

Have you held any council or committee positions?

I have volunteered as education liaison on the STC/SM Chapter Council since 2004.

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

It seems that no matter what kind of job I've held in the past, I always ended up either documenting tasks and processes or explaining to others how to do them, and I really enjoy it. I finally decided to pursue it as a career after I contracted with a technical writer to create a handbook at a former job and then realized that I could have done it myself.

Where are you currently employed?

Thomson Creative Solutions in Dexter, Michigan.

What are your job activities?

Our company produces tax and accounting software for practicing accountants. I am a senior writer for our practice management products. I work on product documentation (user guides, online Help, and bulletins) and training materials for the software.

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

I like the WebHelp for the product I am currently working on. It is the first WebHelp project that I've worked on, and it is also the only project of this size that I have had the opportunity to create entirely from the ground up, before the first version of the product was released. It was nice to be able to choose how to structure the information and present the content instead of editing something that was already in place.

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STC International Annual Conference

Make the Technical Communication Summit—STC's annual conference—your primary source of learning about technical communication. The STC International Annual Conference takes place May 13 through 16, 2007 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For more information, visit www.stc.org/54thConf/index.asp



STC Council Member Spotlight: Erin Moulton

by Elaine Wisniewski

Erin Moulton is the vice president of our chapter and has been a member of STC for 3 years.

She has a master's degree from Eastern Michigan University in professional writing. Her undergraduate degrees are in French and writing.

Why did you decide to become a council member?

I wanted to contribute in a meaningful way to our chapter. I had been volunteering with the programs committee, and this was a way to further involve myself and give back to the chapter that has given me so many opportunities.

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

One of my goals is to promote the chapter and encourage other members to get involved. I also want to encourage students to join and participate.

Additionally, I hope that, with the other council members, we can improve member services, professional, and educational opportunities.

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

I wanted to pursue a writing career and felt that technical communication offered many exciting challenges, opportunities, and potential for growth.

Where are you currently employed?

Arbor Networks, Inc.

What are your job activities?

I write user documentation for one of our software products.

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

In the past, I've coordinated some small QA testing projects, which included writing the feature specifications, writing the testing documentation, coordinating the testing, and writing testing summary reports.

At Arbor, I'm working on internationalization practices for our documentation so that we can offer better documentation to our international clients.

How has your STC membership helped you with your career?

The STC has helped me in numerous ways. I've been able to network with various professionals, learn about new practices in technical communication and technology, attend conferences, and even form friendships. I'm so glad that I joined.

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

My advice is to be proactive with your education and learning new skills. Of course, if you haven't already, join the STC and our chapter.

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

So far, getting my master's in professional writing was a big career and academic achievement for me.

Remote Seminars From STC International

STC International sponsors remote seminars. Full seminar descriptions and registration information are at:

www.stc.org/edu/seminarsList01.asp

January 17

1 pm to 2:30 pm EST

[The X Factor-From HTML to XHTML](#)

Neil Perlin

January 31

1 pm to 2:30 pm EST

[ANSI Z535.6 - A New Standard for Safety Information in Product-Accompanying Literature](#)

Steven Hall and Elaine Wisniewski

February 7

1 pm to 2:30 pm EST

[Creating Indexes on Web Sites and Intranets](#)

Heather Hedden

February 21

1 pm to 2:30 pm EST

[Working in Global Teams](#)

Makarand Pandit

MIUPA January Meeting

The Michigan Usability Professionals Association (MIUPA) is meeting at ProQuest in Ann Arbor on January 17.

The topic is "Search Analytics: Diagnosing What Ails Your Site," an evening presentation by Louis Rosenfeld.

Check the MIUPA Web site for details:
www.miupa.org

Ann Arbor ASTD Upcoming Events

The Ann Arbor Chapter of the ASTD (the American Society of Training and Development) hosts monthly meetings at Washtenaw Community College.

On January 11, the topic is "Knowledge Café – A Tool for Powerful Conversations at Work."

On February 1, the proposed topic is "Delivering Training."

Registration information is at:
www.astdannarbor.org/programs.html

World Usability Day

Dave Mitropoulos-Rundus, President,
Michigan UPA

World Usability Day for Michigan tipped the 300 attendee mark this year (about 100 more than last year). Sarah Swierenga and the Michigan State University Usability and Accessibility Center were wonderful hosts and provided lab tours to interested parties.

The morning workshops were packed, and the afternoon presentations were extremely well attended. Sponsors, university research programs, and local chapters had information tables and were on hand to meet attendees during the afternoon break.

On the global scale, there was a final count of 220 events in 40 countries throughout the day and time zones.

If you were not able to attend or if you wish to repeat your experience, much of the day was captured and will be available for streaming from the Usability and Accessibility Center Web site in the coming weeks:

www.usability.msu.edu/conf2006.asp

National Public Radio's show, "Marketplace" (a popular US radio show on business) focused their final segment of November 14 on World Usability Day. Tim Bedore is a comedian who provided the commentary. It's available (along with the text version) at: <http://tinyurl.com/w7kyc>

The Michigan Usability Professionals' Association sends its thanks to all of those who presented, volunteered, and/or came out to engage in the biggest usability event on record in the state of Michigan to date.

STC's Executive Director Speaks at November Meeting

by Erin Moulton

In the past few years, there have been many exciting changes to the STC. These changes might have left you wondering where the STC is going in the future. You might also have wondered what those changes mean to you and your local STC chapter. On Tuesday, November 14, we all got the chance to learn more. Susan Burton, STC's new executive director, spoke to our chapter about the future of the STC.

A dynamic speaker, Burton explained how she, the board of directors, and office staff are advancing the Society into the future. To demonstrate this, she discussed her six strategic objectives for the STC:

- telling our powerful story
- implementing a strategic business model
- growing relationships and choosing partners
- making money
- growing and supporting our leaders
- improving practice through research and education

Additionally, she announced some important changes to the annual STC conference. At the conference, attendees will have a new option to choose from---a format of multiple smaller conferences within the larger conference. Attendees can choose sessions within a specific topic area and then receive certificates of completion to take back to their companies. Attendees can also choose various sessions across the topic areas.

Read more about the Technical Communication Summit at <http://www.stc.org/54thConf/index.asp>

Also, Burton is interested in hearing about the technical communication stories of STC/SM members. She is encouraging us all to contact STC international (<http://www.stc.org/about/formFeedback01.asp>) to tell our own powerful stories about how technical communication has affected our lives and organizations.

In addition to speaking to our chapter that evening, Burton also spoke at the World Usability Day (<http://www.worldusabilityday.org/>) event in East Lansing.

For 30 years, Burton has worked with a variety of trade and professional associations. Prior to her position with STC, she was president and CEO of the American College of Health Care Administrators. She has served as the interim CEO for three associations, each of which hired her to take them through a transition to become more cost-effective and improve customer service. She is an American Society of Association Executives-certified association executive.

Many thanks to AAA in Dearborn, who hosted the meeting.

Member Spotlight: Andrea Frazier

by Elaine Wisniewski (cont.)

How has your STC membership helped you with your career?

I would say that I began building the career before I joined STC, but getting to know others in the organization (and, indeed, all over the world) has given me insight into what others are doing in the world of technical communication. The number of people that you know, the names in the industry that you recognize and what they're known for, only grows with time and deepens your understanding of the profession. Being part of such a large community and getting exposure to others' best practices gives me more confidence as a member of our profession.

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

All industries change with time, and although what you learn now in school will prepare you for work, your education is barely the beginning. Keep in touch with your fellow students and instructors. Get involved with a student chapter of STC if you can, and do try to explore the special interest groups and online communities—they are invaluable for keeping current. There is, in my opinion, a definite culture to the world of technical communication; and the sooner you get involved with it, the sooner you can benefit from the collective experience and knowledge of your colleagues. As you participate, don't forget to give back. Volunteering and providing assistance to others who need answers is a terrific way to build relationships and develop resources for when you need help, too.

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

No formal awards, but I consider it an achievement whenever I hear through the grapevine that a user really found our Help or user guides useful.

Any other comments you'd like to include?

I hope one day to be able to organize for STC/SM the wide range of activities and programs that some of the other chapters are doing for their student members and academic communities. I think that those kinds of programs take time to grow, but they are worth doing if you can gather the resources to do them.

STC/SM MIUPA Downtown Detroit Networking Luncheons

When: Thursday, January 11

Where: Pizza Papalis at 553 Monroe St. in Detroit

For information about free parking, contact Dave Mitropoulos-Rundus at president@miupa.org

STC/SM Volunteer Opportunities

If any of the following volunteer opportunities sounds 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.

STC-SM Co-sponsoring Internet User Experience 2007

February 19 through 22, 2007 in Ann Arbor Michigan

This third annual Internet User Experience (IUE) conference brings you top industry speakers, practitioners, and authors to provide you with the most complete package of Internet user experience design training, case studies, and real-world examples ever assembled.

IUE has graduated into a full conference event right in our back yard. The scope has expanded to include most aspects of Web site design and strategy, including user experience design, graphics, branding, marketing message, effective Web writing, and enhancements that drive customers to your site. In addition to conference presentations and tutorials, there will be lunchtime mini-workshops and a student poster session. Come to learn, network, and find.

Find details and registration at www.internetuserexperience.biz

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 will be granted to graduate students and two to undergraduates.

Eligibility

Applicants must have completed at least 1 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 1 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.

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:

www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01_national.asp

Reminder: Chapter Competition Dry Run

by Laura Allen, Professional Liaison

Our chapter's Competition Dry Run is starting this month. You can become involved in the competition by submitting an entry, serving as a judge, or volunteering for the competition committee.

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) for competitive submissions.

Note, the chapter has also expanded the type of submissions accepted to competitive and noncompetitive submissions. A competitive submission fulfills all submission requirements and will compete against other competitive submissions in the category submitted. A noncompetitive submission doesn't fulfill all submission requirements and won't compete against other competitive entries but will still receive valuable feedback from the judges.

Submissions will be accepted between January 17, 2007 and February 28, 2007. A complete Dry Run timeline, as well as informational packages for entrants and judges, will be posted on the chapter Web site shortly. Drop-off locations for entries are planned; *please consider asking your company to act as a drop-off location*. No entry fee is being charged for the Dry Run, and informal chapter awards will be given for all submissions.

Being involved in competitions is a fairly new yet exciting experience for all of us. We hope you will consider being involved. Feel free to contact the professional liaison at profliaison@stc-sm.org with any questions or feedback or to volunteer.

January Program

“Storytelling and Podcasting-New Media for Technical Communication”

As technical communicators, it's our job to make technical content accessible and available to end users. We typically write and publish by means of documents, Help systems, or Web sites. Are there alternatives? Is there a better way? Timothy Keirnan, co-founder of the Michigan Usability Professionals' Association (MIUPA), and Professor Corinne Stavish of Lawrence Technological University (LTU) will each offer a new perspective.

Corinne Stavish

Corinne Stavish, a college professor in humanities at LTU in Southfield, teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in the Technical and Professional Communication Program and is acting director of that program. She consults with corporations and gives presentations on communication skills, team building, leadership development, and outstanding presentations. In 2005, she led a workshop with NASA representatives on how to use storytelling in written and oral presentations. Additionally, she tours the country as a storyteller and keynote speaker.

Timothy Keirnan

Timothy Keirnan holds a master of technical and scientific communication degree from Miami University and an audio engineering degree from the State University of New York at Fredonia. After a lot of fun working in several technical communication/usability consultancies, he decided to try working "on the inside" of a company to observe usability interventions over time. Tim preaches the gospel of user-centered design from the strategic vantage point of the IT technical communications team. Tim co-founded the MIUPA Chapter. His current main project is the usability-related podcast "Design Critique: Products for People," which he co-hosts with Tom Brinck.

Particulars:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Date: | Thursday, January 25 |
| Time: | 6:30 pm: networking and appetizers 7 pm: speakers' presentations |
| Location: | Lawrence Technological University 21000 West Ten Mile Road Southfield |
| Price: | \$15 for STC members \$20 for nonmembers \$10 for students belonging to STC \$12 for students not belonging to STC **ADD \$5 for registrations postmarked after January 22 and for walk-ins** |

Registration:

Please register by email at register@stc-sm.org or by mail at:

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

(Be sure to mail your payment as well.)