

Byline



Quarterly Newsletter for STC Chicago Members

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STC Delegation Finds Technical Communicator an Emerging Profession in China

By Paula Ludmann

A delegation of 15 STC members from four countries met in China this past October. Led by Linda Oestreich, 2007 – 2008 STC President, our mission was to exchange information about technical communications with our Chinese colleagues. During seven meetings in three cities, we networked with about 60 to 70 individuals and learned:

1. **Not everyone understands the profession of technical communicator.** Even in highly technical fields, technical communicator is an unknown profession to many in China. Companies generally ask developers and programmers to write the documentation if any is required. After all, who knows the product best?

Our delegation saw this as an opportunity to explain the value of technical communications. While not everyone “got it,” we could see from their body language that some realized the inherent value that experienced technical communicators bring to the company and its customers.

2. **Technical communicator is an emerging profession in China.** While only a hand-

ful of people work as technical communicators in China today, interest in this field is growing. Large companies including Cisco, Hewlett Packard, IBM, and National Instruments have created technical documentation teams in China. More technical documentation is gradually moving to onsite research and development centers in countries like India and China, so universities are starting to offer courses in technical writing. In Beijing, our delegation met with professors and students at Peking University where many, but not all, understood the need for courses in technical communications.

3. **The future looks bright for technical communications in China.** From the technical writers we met in Shanghai to the professors and IT students we spoke with in Beijing, it appears that many Chinese have an interest in technical communications. As this interest grows and more courses are offered, it seems only natural that the number of technical communicators in China will grow.
4. **Write globally; think visually.** While this seems to be mantra of every tech



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writer these days, the point really hit home during a presentation given at Peking University. Representing the university’s Visual Information Communication Department, Ms. Liu Jing spoke about designing information in China. To demonstrate her concepts, Ms. Liu (surname always appears before first name) showed us a virtual museum site. Meant to bring the museum to people across this vast country, the site relies heavily on visual elements. This helps ensure that people of all educational levels can understand and enjoy the virtual exhibits.

Meeting with colleagues in China was deeply rewarding, and I believe that I speak for the delegation when I say that we want to continue these exchanges. Linda, our tireless and wonderfully supportive leader, has looked into this. She reports, “There’s a possibility of some Chinese getting government support to join STC as part of their growing consciousness and outreach to the West.”

If you want to know more about our meetings and the places we went, visit our blog, <http://techcommchina.livejournal.com>. Ω

As the people in our own audiences become more diverse, we would do well to remember this concept and implement it when feasible.



Delegates pose with colleagues at HP Global Delivery China Center in Shanghai. Chicago Chapter STC members are Kathy Raker, standing third from left, and Paula Ludmann, standing sixth from left. Photo courtesy of Huang Shunqiang.

Appeal to Members: Ask What You Can Do for STC Chicago

By Dan Dornbrook - Chapter Vice President



*And so, my fellow Americans,
ask not what your country can
do for you. Ask what you can do
for your country.*

—President John F. Kennedy,
in his inaugural speech

Kennedy

As our nation witnesses a presidential transition even more historic than that of 1961, STC Chicago is at a pivotal moment in our life as a volunteer organization. Our ability to serve our members depends directly on the willingness of our members to serve and support each other.

Therefore, as volunteer coordinator (the unofficial second title of the chapter vice president), I offer the following challenge: Ask not what your chapter can do for you. Ask what you can do for your chapter. Oh, and if you are one of those folks who wait for a written invitation before volunteering (and are an STC member in good standing, of course) ... consider yourself invited.

Program Manager Needed

As most of you know, the Program Committee manager position has been open since June 2008, when John Hartigan completed two years of outstanding service in that position. I mention John's name only to commend him for his fine work following in the footsteps of other recent program managers (including our current webmaster, Chris Hester, and our current treasurer, Linda Kelley).

Members have said on many occasions that they consider our regular program meetings to be one of the

most valuable services that our chapter provides, not only for the content of the presentations, but also for the opportunities to network with colleagues. These meetings are possible only because of the dedicated efforts of volunteers in planning and organizing them. Responsibilities of the program manager include reserving meeting venues (including for the awards banquet), ordering refreshments, finding speakers for program meetings, confirming arrangements with speakers from outside the Chicago area, and transporting the chapter-owned LCD projector to meeting venues (when speakers bring laptop computers for presentations).

Our program meetings (and our award banquet) are planned through June 2009, but we need to identify a program manager so we can start planning for the 2009-2010 season, especially finding speakers who can present on topics of interest to our members.

Our ability to continue offering meetings that our members will value depends on filling this key position. You can volunteer by contacting me at vicepresident@stc-chicago.org.

Officer Candidates Sought

As most of you also know, our chapter elects officers every spring for the year beginning in July and continuing through the following June. In most years, the vice president steps into the presidency at that time, creating an opening for a new vice president – and in some years for a new treasurer or secretary as well. Candidates for open officer positions are identified by the Nominating Committee – whose members in turn are elected by chapter members at the same time as officers. The volunteers on the committee work behind the scenes in the spring to identify willing and able

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"Ask Not" - Continued from Page 3

candidates in time for the annual election.

In recent years, most of these elections have been unopposed. That is not because of any aversion to contested elections, but because of the challenge of finding members who are willing to serve as officers. In at least one recent instance, multiple members declined requests to serve in a particular office before one member stepped forward. In short, it is never too soon to start the search for candidates.

As a member, you can recommend candidates to the Nominating Committee by contacting Becky Hall, the committee manager, at nominating@stc-chicago.org.

Membership Volunteers Wanted

Speaking of members, our chapter's existence depends

on our ability to retain members and attract new ones, and our funding is based directly on our membership numbers. STC initiatives like the Reach for the Stars Member-Get-a-Member Campaign play a role in this, but our chapter's own efforts play an equally if not more important role.

Our current Membership Committee manager, Kelly Oja, has launched some excellent initiatives to retain and attract members to our chapter. In order to move these initiatives forward, Kelly needs help from members who are willing to volunteer a little time for a big potential result (especially now, during the renewal season). You can help by contacting Kelly at membership@stc-chicago.org.

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STC Chicago Member Profile - Bill Leavitt



STC Member	STC Fellow
Member Since	1964
Job Title	President of Write On Technical Writing, Inc.
STC Affiliation	Chicago Chapter
Years of Experience	48 years
Tech Comm Philosophy	I believe that Technical Writing is the one kind of writing whose purpose always involves helping people to do something.
Favorite STC Moment	Helping chapter leaders deal with problems while I was an STC director-sponsor between 1983 and 1986.
Favorite Work Moment	In 1989, completing a \$2 million project leading 17 people ahead of schedule, under budget, and at the highest level of quality.
Working on Now	Teaching technical report writing to engineering students at Purdue-Calumet.
Favorite Movie	<i>Office Space</i>
Favorite Music	ABBA (the Swedish singing group from the 1970s).
Favorite Book	The Hornblower Series of books by C.S. Forester (who also wrote <i>The African Queen</i>).
Favorite Technical Communicators	Frank Smith, former editor of <i>Technical Communication</i> .
Where I'd Like to Be 10 Years From Now	Still alive and kicking.

"Ask Not" - Continued from Page 4



The torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.

– also from President Kennedy's inaugural speech

Like any volunteer organization, STC Chicago experiences turnover. Volunteers come and go (many of us more than once) as our lives and our jobs permit.

Leaders are always looking for members who are willing to give back to the chapter, because those members will become the leaders of tomorrow. The torch is be-

ing passed (and will be passed again). Will you accept it?

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America - they will be met.

– from President Barack Obama's inaugural speech
Ω

Spring Course Offered by the NIU-STC Institute for Professional Development

By Jessica Reyman

The NIU-STC Institute for Professional Development is offering Fundamentals of Technical Communication this Spring. Although the course is designed for people with little or no experience in the field, it often enrolls a wide range of participants, including workplace professionals. The course consists of seven Saturday workshops (9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.), each taught by an expert in the workshop topic. Participants also work with a mentor who is experienced in technical communication. Participants earn three hours of undergraduate or graduate credit through Northern Illinois University.

The course professor will be Jessica Reyman, Assistant Professor of rhetoric and professional writing at NIU and Managing Director of the NIU-STC Institute for Professional Development.

The Institute for Professional Development is a partnership between the Chicago Chapter of the STC and NIU. The Institute provides courses for college students seeking a more practical understanding of the field of professional writing and for working professionals interested in advancing their careers through more in-depth knowledge of a particular area of technical communication. The courses are intended to bridge the gap between theory and application by combining the knowledge of those in academe, who research, study, and teach technical communication, and the practical expertise of those in the workplace, who daily confront the challenges of what it means to be a successful practitioner of technical communication.

To register, access NIU's online registration system, MyNIU, at www.niu.edu/myniu/. If you are not a current NIU student or have not been one lately, contact NIU Office of Registration and Records at (815) 753-

0681 or by e-mail at regrec@niu.edu. Undergraduates register for ENGL 424 (13124), graduates for ENGL 624 (13129). The approximate cost is \$1100, plus course materials.

For more information, visit www.stc-chicago.org or contact Jessica Reyman at jreyman@niu.edu.

Schedule for Fundamentals of Technical Communication, Spring 2009

January 24

Introduction to Course & Profession, Jessica Reyman, Northern Illinois University

February 7

Anatomy of a Documentation Project, Chris Hester, InfoSix

February 21

Writing for Online Media, Brande Martin, Medscape/WebMD

March 21

Usability Testing and Management, Chris Nemeth, University of Chicago

April 4

Presenting Data Visually, Karl Keller, Communication Partners

April 18

Writing Clearly, Concisely, & Correctly, Mary Ryba Knepper, Ryba Associates

May 2

Participant Presentations Ω

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Quick Reference Cards

By Nancy Carpenter



An effective quick reference card can be a lifeline of useful information; a poorly written, poorly designed one may spend its days as a coaster for the user's coffee cup. The difference between the lifeline and coaster is good planning and execution.

How to Avoid the Top Six Mistakes When Creating a Quick Reference Card

Kitchen Sink Syndrome

Including everything. Taking a user guide, shrinking the font, and slapping it on a four-color, laminated 8 ½ x11 inch card.

Solution: Ask yourself, "Is a quick reference card the best layout to use?" Can you clearly convey the information in the quick reference card format? Do you have the budget for color printing, cutting, and laminating? If yes, check the lead time required for planning, designing, researching, writing, editing, reviewing, and printing.

Size Does Matter

An 8 ½ x 11-inch quick reference card is not really a card. It is a full-fledged document. Where does the user store the stash of larger-than-life quick reference cards?

Solution: Quick reference cards can be sized down for use at a cash register, next to a computer, or mounted on a workstation. Smaller-sized cards can hold a large amount of information, if the presentation is clear and concise.

The Invisible User

Disregarding the reader's needs and wants.

Solution: Test out a prototype of the quick reference card with a user. Can the user easily locate needed information? Is the language easy to understand? Does the quick reference card contain the information the user needs?

Incorrect Information

Using outdated information from a document that was written months or years ago.

Solution: Connect with the product itself, familiarize yourself with it, and rely on subject matter experts to help you keep the content correct and accurate.

Color Coding Confusion

Color-coding can work in some instances, but why make the reader figure out your color-coding? We know that decaf coffee comes in a green container, and regular coffee in red, but would we really notice that shipping and receiving procedures are in the purple section and cashiering techniques are in the brown?

Solution: Instead of color-coding, use a unique font color, or color border to break information into chunks. Avoid using colors indiscriminately just to make the presentation look interesting.

Specialty Fonts

Fonts like Rage Italic, Forte, and Tempus Sans ITC may look great on a greeting card, but use them on a quick reference card and the readability suffers.

Solution: Use sans-serif fonts and an easy-on-the-eyes font size to aid in readability. Ω

Upcoming Meetings and Networking Events

Wednesday, January 21, 2009: Innovate Like Edison

CISPI's next monthly meeting will be a group book review of "Innovate Like Edison: The Success System of America's Greatest Inventor." Registration deadline: Sunday, January 18. Online rates (before deadline): \$15 for CISPI members, \$25 for non-members.

When: 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Where: Pricewaterhouse Coopers, One North Wacker, Chicago.

Register at: www.cispi.com

For directions: Call (312) 298-2000 or visit the web site: www.pwc.com.

Friday, January 23, 2009: ID&L SIG Webinar – Matching Instructional Strategies to the Content

Attend this webinar and learn how to apply instructional strategies that engage learners, aid in recall and retention, and provide a solid foundation for learner job performance. Online registration rate: \$25 for members and non-members.

When: 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Where: Online

Register at: www.stcidlsig.org.

Tuesday, February 10, 2009: Introduction to Second Life®

Join CISPI members for an introduction to the 3-D virtual world of Second Life. Ed Prentice of Centrax Corporation will facilitate this meeting. Registration deadline: Friday, February 6. Online rates (before deadline): \$15 for CISPI members, \$25 for non-members.

When: 6 p.m. (Presentation at 6:30 p.m.). A light dinner will be offered.

Where: Centrax Corporation, 180 N. Stetson, 51st floor, Chicago, IL 60601

Register at: www.cispi.com.

For directions: Call (312) 946-9360 or visit the web site: www.centrax.com.

Tuesday, March 10, 2009: STC Chicago Awards Banquet

Join us for the STC Chicago annual awards banquet, with Italian entrees served family style.

When: 5:30 p.m. (dinner at 6:30, ceremony at 7:30)

Where: Francesca's Amici, 174 N. York Road, Elmhurst.

Register at: www.stc-chicago.org (click on "Meetings" then "Meeting Registration").

For directions: Call 630-279-7970 or visit the web site: www.miafrancesca.com/restaurants/amici/location.asp.

Thursday, April 23, 2009: Web-based Project Management

Our speaker, Milwaukee-based entrepreneur Ken Cook, will discuss web-based tools that technical communicators can use to manage projects. Buffet dinner featuring food from Philander's Restaurant is included.

A cash bar is available. Registration deadline: Thursday, April 16. Online rates (before deadline): \$30 for members, \$40 for non-members. Rates at the door (cash or check only): \$40 for members, \$50 for non-members.

When: 6 p.m. (presentation at 7). A deli buffet and soft drinks (hot and cold) are included.

Where: Carleton Hotel, 1110 Pleasant St., Oak Park.

Register at: www.stc-chicago.org (click on "Meetings" then "Meeting Registration").

For directions: Call 708-848-5000 or visit the hotel web site: www.carletonhotel.com/directions.asp.

Thursdays @ STC Chicago: Networking Events

Join STC Chicago members for lunch or dinner on the first Thursday of each month. These networking events are free. Attendees pay for their own food and drinks.

When: Lunch at 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.; Dinner at 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Where: A variety of locations in the city and suburbs.

For details, visit www.stc-chicago.org (click on "Thursdays @ STC Chicago"). Ω

Renewal Notification

Renewal notification has begun for the 2009 Society year. All STC members can renew their memberships online at www.stc.org. For membership dues, STC accepts checks in US or Canadian dollars, as well as payments made by American Express, MasterCard, or Visa. Dues payments should be received by **28 February 2009**. Note that only members who have paid their dues by 28 February will be eligible to vote in the 2009 STC election.

The renewal invoices for 2009 allow members to choose one of the following individual membership categories: classic, e-membership, and student. The costs of these categories vary across the three tiers established by STC's localized dues structure. For costs and other information relating to membership categories and localized dues, please see www.stc.org.

Prorated Dues for New Members

STC has recently implemented an automatic proration system. Dues will be calculated exactly from the date you join to 31 December of that year.

Other Rates for 2009

Members who do not receive a dues renewal invoice in November are those who joined STC on or after 1 October 2008 and Corporate Value Program (CVP) members.

Confused?

If you have any questions about dues renewal, please contact the STC membership department; Lynn Anderson, Membership Manager; or Julia O'Connor, Membership Manager. Ω

STC Executive Director Meets with Siemens Technical Communicators

By Russ Friend, Associate Fellow

As part of a new initiative to increase membership in the Society, Susan Burton, Executive Director of the STC, has been visiting chapters with the intention of getting to know more about the member community. In November, our chapter had the pleasure of one of those visits. If you attended the November meeting, you'll remember that she gave a short presentation entitled "Investing in Your Future: The Value of STC Membership." The following day she met with the Technical Communication Department of Siemens Building Technologies, Inc. in Buffalo Grove where I work as a Senior Technical Writer.

When I approached my supervisor, Patrick Mehl, with the idea of inviting Susan, he replied that we should make it a special event for our department. He suggested that we invite the folks who attend the *Thursdays @ STC Chicago* Northern Location monthly events and that Siemens would provide box lunches from Jimmy John's.

The event was a success. In addition to the Tech Writers from Siemens, there were also several independent Technical Communicators along with folks from Zebra Technologies, E.H. Wachs Company, and Spherion. STC Chicago Chapter President Francis Bao and Immediate Past President Linda Jansak joined us as well.

It was a great opportunity for us to ask Susan questions about the future of the profession, as well as interact with area Technical Communicators and generate more interest in renewing membership in the Society. As a result, at least one Siemens technical writer decided to take advantage of membership in the STC. Ω

STC Costs: The Cash You Save May Be Your Own

By Gloria H. McConnell, Sherry J. Michaels, and Katherine E. Graden, Senior Members

Even if you know all the career benefits you can realize through STC membership and attendance at STC conferences, you may still wonder if the costs are reasonable and how they compare to the fees that other professional societies charge. Well, guess what? Other professional associations don't match the value that STC offers.

Recently, we compared STC membership fees with those charged by other professional associations that attract people in our profession. We also looked at registration fees for STC's annual conference versus fees for five other technical communication or training development conferences. We found that, in both cases, STC offers the best deals.

Membership Fees

Table 1 shows how STC's range of membership fees compares with other organizations' fees.

Association	Membership Fees
American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)	\$199 for national membership; local chapter membership fees typically range from \$25 to \$85 per year.
Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Communications Society (IEEE Communications)	\$169 for US members; membership in other IEEE societies costs an additional \$10 to \$50 per year. Publications are extra per year.
International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI)	\$145 plus a separate fee for the society's journal.
Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)	\$225 for members with two or more years' experience in PR.
Society for Technical Communication (STC)	\$175 for full membership <i>including publications</i> ; \$100 for retired members; \$165 for e-membership; \$60 for student membership.

Table 1 Association Membership Fees

Professional Conference Costs

Suppose you can afford to attend only one professional conference within the next year. Which one offers the

best deal? Table 2 provides some information on costs of recent and upcoming conferences to help guide your decision.

Conference	Duration	Registration Fee
DocTrain	2 days	\$999
CSTD (Canadian Society for Training and Development) Knowledge	4 days	\$1,099 for members; \$1,299 for nonmembers
CLO (Chief Learning Officer)	3 days	\$1,695 early bird; \$1,995 after deadline
GlobeCom (IEEE special interest group on communications)	5 days	\$780 for early bird members; \$900 after deadline; \$1,050 early bird nonmembers; \$1,220 after deadline
IEEE Consumer Communications and Networking	4 days	\$660 for early bird members, \$775 after deadline; \$875 early bird nonmembers; \$1,015 after deadline
STC's 56th Annual Conference	4 days	\$795 for early bird members, \$995 advance; \$1,095 for early bird nonmembers, \$1,195 for advance non-

Table 2 Select Conference Registration Fees

Table 2 covers only registration fees for the conference—sand does not include additional funds needed for airfare, lodging, meals, and so on. In many cases, your travel expenses may be two or even three times as much as the conference fee.

STC's fees are comparable to or less expensive than fees charged by similar professional associations, in conjunction with particularly low hotel rates. Think about that when deciding how to spend your professional association dollars!

*Rates verified by information posted on the organizations' websites, October 2008. Ω

STC Membership at a Glance

Total members: 13,263

Members residing in the U.S.: 11,236

Members residing in Canada: 1,206

Members residing elsewhere: 821

Total communities*: 155

*Includes 104 professional chapters, 30 student chapters, and 21 SIGs.

STC Chicago Membership at a Glance

Total Affiliated Members: 335

Associate Fellows: 8

Fellows: 6

Members: 107

Senior Members: 197

Student Members: 17

Ω

Win Registration to 2009 Summit

STC Chicago will award a registration to the 2009 Technical Communication Summit to the winner of a random drawing from members who renew their memberships by February 28.

The winner of the drawing will receive registration (not including travel expenses) to the Summit, which will take place May 3-6 in Atlanta, GA. (For more information about the Summit, go to conference.stc.org.)

To renew your membership, go to www.stc.org/membership/join01.asp. Please remember to select STC Chicago as a community. Ω

Byline

Editor:

Tom Lunde, byline@stc-chicago.org

Advertising Manager:

Francis Bao, vicepresident@stc-chicago.org

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Advertising: We encourage advertising that follows STC guidelines and promotes services to STC Chicago members.

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Whole page (7.5"x9"): \$500 (1 issue).

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Society for Technical Communication

Phone: 703-522-4114

Fax: 703-522-2075

www.stc.org

STC Chicago Chapter Leaders 2008

President

Francis Bao
president@stc-chicago.org

Treasurer

Linda Kelley
treasurer@stc-chicago.org

Immediate Past President

Linda Jansak
ipp@stc-chicago.org

Newsletter Committee

Tom Lunde
byline@stc-chicago.org

Vice President

Dan Dornbrook
vicepresident@stc-chicago.org

Program Committee

Open
program@stc-chicago.org

Secretary

MaryKay Grueneberg
secretary@stc-chicago.org

Scholarship Committee

Open
scholarship@stc-chicago.org

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