



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

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MACNEALY NAMED STC ASSOCIATE FELLOW

by David Armbruster

Associate Fellow: n., a person who has been active in the field of technical communication for at least 15 years; a member of the Society for Technical Communication for at least 10 years; and who has made significant contributions to the field of technical communication, done original work that contributed to the advancement of technical communication, or made significant contributions to the Society.

At the January 2003 STC Board of Directors meeting, Dr. Mary Sue MacNealy was elected into this very select group of STC members recognized for their many achievements to the profession and Society. Currently, 0.5% of STC members are Associate Fellows.

Dr. MacNealy is currently vice president of the Mid-South Chapter; she will become president of the chapter later this spring.

Prior to coming to the University of Memphis in 1988, Dr. MacNealy received her Ph.D. in rhetoric from Carnegie Mellon University, where she was also a teaching assistant, instructor, mentor, and consultant, primarily in the area of document design.

As a faculty member in the Department of English, University of Memphis, she is currently coordinator of the graduate program in Professional Writing and Composition. Since 1988, her numerous activities and accomplishments have included directing the thesis research of many graduate students, successfully applying for grants, and developing Write Night.

Dr. MacNealy's articles, several of which have won awards, have appeared in *Technical Communication*, *IEEE Transactions in Professional Communication*, and *Technical Writing and Communication*. She has presented more than 20 papers at STC and IEEE conferences, and she has served on the

editorial boards of *Technical Communication*, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *Discourse Processes*, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, and *IEEE Transactions in Professional Communication*.

Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing, published by Allyn & Bacon in 1999, is the result of her long-standing interest in research.



Associate Fellow

In the Mid-South Chapter, Dr. MacNealy has worked unceasingly to create our scholarship program, to provide continuing education programs for members and nonmembers alike, and to encourage younger members to seek expanded roles in the chapter and profession. She has also served as chapter treasurer for many years.

She has been awarded STC's Chapter Service Award twice and last year received the Society's prestigious Jay R. Gould Award for excellence in teaching technical communication.

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While the activities and accomplishments noted here are certainly impressive, most have been achieved behind the scenes by encouraging other and mentoring students and colleagues—all with an eye toward strengthening our chapter, Society, and profession.

On a personal note, I hope all of you can join Dr. MacNealy in Dallas on May 20 when she will be formally recognized for her achievements at the Awards Banquet during the STC Annual Conference.

David L. Armbruster, Ph.D., is an STC Fellow and STC Past President.

NAME TAGS: SHOES FOR THE COBBLER'S KIDS

For March: Name tags—and shoes?

by Leanne Logan

Come learn about effective and ineffective ways to use name tags at this interesting talk using show-and-tell techniques to make a point. This session is a precursor to a session Professor MacNealy is giving on the same topic at the STC Annual Conference in Dallas, May 18-21, 2003.

Many professional organizations (including STC) and nonprofit groups (such as churches) ask their members to wear name tags to help facilitate communication and interaction at meetings and conferences. However, as many of these groups learn the hard way,

the design of these name tags often defeats their purpose.

Using various name tags collected at conferences and other events, Dr. MacNealy will demonstrate how to use document design principles to enable name tags to effectively achieve their purpose. The primary document design principles illustrated will include Clutter, Emphasis, and Font choices. As practicing technical communicators will attest, having a poor document design impedes the usability of our documents for our intended readers. Employing sound document design principles when creating name tags will ensure greater success in enabling effective communication when we do have the opportunity to meet and work with others in person.

Come have fun with us and learn more about how name tags are related to shoes for the cobbler's kids. I know I, for one, am interested in hearing more.

See the last page of this newsletter for more details about the meeting.

Remember the Phones

We continue to collect used cell phones at our program meetings to benefit victims of domestic violence. Working phones, batteries, and chargers will be collected and distributed to family violence shelters, to be given to individuals who are victims of family violence and in risky domestic situations.



The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. It is the largest organization of its type in the world. The Society's 25,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, multimedia artists, Web and Intranet page information designers, translators, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.

Membership in STC offers opportunities to learn new job skills, network with other technical communicators, and broaden your professional horizons.

To learn more about what the STC has to offer, visit:

<http://www.stc.org/>



Designing the future of technical communication

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Region 3
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A sharing community creating opportunity

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

by Nell Johnson



Now is the time to nominate a member or to consider running for a position with the Mid-South chapter.

Positions open for election this year are vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Contact Nell Johnson at 901.434.8426 or Jackie Walters at 901.434.7489 if you would like to make a nomination. Nominations will be officially closed on March 3.

MEETING NOTES

by Elizabeth Boone

Mid-South chapter member Dr. Michael Albers, Assistant Professor of English at the University of Memphis, explained to February meeting's audience of 23 the difficulties of communicating content to users of Personal Digital Assistants, or PDAs. For the purposes of his presentation, Albers defined PDAs as Palm and WinCE formats, not cellular phones. Much of the talk centered around the PDA's screen, which is a major limitation in sending information via the hand-held device.

PDA screens are small, on average 3.1 x 3.7 inches, which means the user has to scroll through information. Also, PDA screens have less color and resolution than desktop computers. Other screen limitations are a lack of installed fonts and an inability to render bold and italic typefaces. Often graphics that are too big for the PDA cause downloading problems, and the default, at least for Palm, is to ignore table tags. These PDA screen issues reduce user reading comprehension. According to Albers, an old desktop monitor with a 640 by 480 resolution reduces reading comprehension by 50%; PDAs have 160 by 160 resolution. Scrolling also impairs comprehension, with research indicating

that three scrolls should be the maximum amount for both desktops and PDAs. Albers illustrated the amount of scrolling required with PDAs by showing that a short 225-word paragraph would take 4.5 scrolls to read on a PDA, as opposed to no scrolls on a desktop.

Despite some limitations, PDAs do work well for communicating information that is procedural or form-based, i.e., linear information. Examples Albers gave of efficient uses of PDAs were writing traffic tickets and making airline reservations. In both instances information is entered step by step. However, in an information climate that is moving toward an on-demand, anywhere environment, PDAs are being used to transmit all types of communication. Therefore, content is developed for PDAs through two writing and design methods. The first customizes writing for the PDA and allows formatting and design to match screen limitations. The second, and more common, method treats PDAs as one of several output devices, that is, material written and designed to be output on paper, Web, PDF, and PDA. Unfortunately, what works for paper or a desktop monitor is often too complex for the PDA.

Since PDA design is still in its formative years, developing content for PDAs requires extensive analysis of users, tasks, and environments. Currently, analysis has shown that writing for PDAs requires small chunks of information. Lists may be an effective presentation for some PDA content because they are easy to scan; however, a drawback to lists is that readers may view each point as independent, thus finding it difficult to connect the content mentally. Presenting tabular information is another option, though it requires scrolling horizontally and columns and row headings may be lost. Graphics should be minimized to save downloading time. If a link is provided in text, it should be relevant to the user's needs because it, too, takes time to download. Content should be designed

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Newsbrief

<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/>

Newsbrief is the monthly publication of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Twelve issues of Newsbrief are published each year. We create the publication to:

- Involve members and visitors more fully in professional development and service.
- Foster a sense of community among chapter members and visitors.
- Provide a link between professors and students at local universities.
- Promote the benefits of chapter membership to attract new members.

Submissions

If you would like to contribute an article to Newsbrief, submit:

- The text portion of the article as a text (TXT) or Microsoft Word (DOC) file, or as text incorporated within the body of an e-mail.
- Photos as JPG or TIFF.

If you choose to use a TIFF, please set the file resolution to 150 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.

To ensure that we publish articles within a timely fashion, we ask that you submit your articles by the tenth of each month for the coming month's issue. Send all submissions to the editor of Newsbrief.

Copyright

Newsbrief invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Please note, however, that by submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to Newsbrief to run your article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. You as the writer nonetheless hold the copyright. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Reprints

Articles published by Newsbrief may be reprinted in other STC publications if credit is given to the author as well as the Mid-South chapter and a copy of the reprint is sent to the Newsbrief editor.

Editor

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to limit the amount of scrolling, which both maintains comprehension and minimizes amount of user interaction. Menus should be simple and no more than three levels deep.

Albers advocates testing PDAs with real users on real devices. Because the PDA is small and has wireless capabilities, users may be retrieving information both indoors and outdoors, in poor or bright lighting, wearing gloves, or with one hand, all of which should be incorporated into user testing scenarios. Albers and University of Memphis colleague and chapter member Dr. Loel Kim have conducted user testing research with PDAs that has been published in *Technical Communication* 49, no.1:45-60 and no. 3:314-329.

**Notes From the January Meeting:
Learn More About Persona
Development**

If you are interested in persona development (January meeting), check out the following book chapter and Web pages suggested by Robert Barlow-Busch, a colleague of January's presenter Tammy teWinkle at Quarry Integrated Communications Inc.

- Chapter 9 of Alan Cooper and Paul Saffo's book *The Inmates Are Running The Asylum: Why High Tech Products Drive Us Crazy and How to Restore the Sanity* (Sams 1999) is dedicated to the concept of personas.
- http://www.cooper.com/content/insights/newsletters_personas.asp
- <http://world.std.com/~uieweb/Articles/Personas.htm>

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

by Tracy Myers, Documentation Specialist for the Navy Department in Millington, TN

As a documentation specialist during the workweek, I document procedures and programming code for the development team of the Navy website (StayNAVY.navy.mil).

But on weekends, I put my writing skills to use in a completely different arena: professional drag racing. I write press releases for Geno Scali, a pro motorcycle racer with the National Hot Rod Association (the NHRA is on par with NASCAR, but instead of racing in an oval, drivers fly down a quarter-mile drag strip).

For me, drag racing is a family affair—my husband, Todd, created Geno's website (genoscali.com, which is currently being overhauled for the new racing season) and writes press releases for Doug Kalitta, an NHRA racer who competes in the Top Fuel category.

Todd and I edit each other's work and brainstorm together about ideas for articles.

Writing press releases for Geno requires me to follow his performance and those of his competitors when he races, which occurs on weekends. I write a pre-release and a wrap-up for each race. His racing category, Pro Stock Bikes, participates in 15 races per season, so I write 30 releases plus special event articles.

When I started writing for Geno I barely knew anything about the mechanics of his motorcycle. I still have a lot to learn, but I've picked up on quite a bit about engines, transmissions, and chassis since I started writing for him last summer.

Writing a press release is somewhat formulaic, so once I understood the basics I had a good template to follow. My press releases are published mainly online at drag racing websites, but every now and then I see my releases in racing magazines. Online publications are a great avenue because fans crave immediate information about their favorite drivers. Plus I love seeing my work in print within hours of submitting it.

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Geno and Tracy with the racing motorcycle

When I can, I hop in a car on Friday afternoons and head to the closest race with my husband. We usually attend the Bristol, TN, St. Louis, MO, Columbus, OH, and Indianapolis, IN, races, as well as the Memphis event every October.

Last fall, we had the opportunity to attend a race in Las Vegas. Rock and roll legends Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley of KISS were sponsors that weekend of the race car my husband is involved with. Besides getting lots of pictures and autographs, I was invited to a VIP party with KISS. It was a blast!

Right now Geno is preparing for the new season, which begins mid-March for the motorcycle class. My pre-season responsibilities include writing press releases to announce Geno's sponsorship deals and testing plans. Ultimately my job is to get Geno as much press coverage as possible, making him stand out amongst the sea of other press releases.

COMING SOON: MEMBER 100000

reprinted from Tieline, February 2003

In the next few months, STC will achieve a milestone of sorts. Some lucky new member will be assigned member number 100000! That's a measure of how many technical communicators over the years have recognized the personal and professional value of STC membership. (Note: The Society did not start assigning membership numbers until 1985, when it computerized its membership records. Since the founding of STC in 1953, more than 115,000 individuals have been members of the Society.)

However, this milestone may also be a minor administrative headache. For example, the STC membership database and the log-on field for the members-only section of the STC Web site need to be modified to accommodate six-digit membership numbers. The IT staff at Society headquarters is looking for other areas where this rollover has the potential to create problems, and recommends that all chapter and SIG web masters and membership managers examine their Web sites and databases. Now is the time to make sure your chapter is ready for member 100000!

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ARTICLES SOLICITED

by Kirk St.Amant

Global Talk, the newsletter of the International Communication Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), is looking for feature articles on intercultural communication for its upcoming issues.

Features should be short (250-500 word) essays, commentaries, or articles on issues dealing with

- Culture and communication
- Culture and design practices
- Technology and intercultural communication
- Translation and localization concepts and practices
- Interactions involving clients and co-workers from other cultures

Individuals interested in either submitting feature articles or proposing/discussing ideas for feature articles should contact Kirk St.Amant at stamankr@jmu.edu.

NEW WEB SITE FOR STC CONFERENCE

reprinted from Tieline, February 2003



The Web site for STC's 50th Annual Conference is up and running. In addition to providing comprehensive, up-to-date information on educational and professional opportunities at the conference, the site features a dynamic online registration form that simplifies the registration process for members. When a member enters his or her five-digit member number, the name and address fields are automatically populated with information from the STC membership database. (Note: To register at the member rate, members must enter their membership number, which appears on the address labels of Intercom, Technical Communication, and all other correspondence from the Society office.

Members who need to be reminded of their membership numbers should call the office at 703.522.4114.

Another new feature of the conference Web site allows visitors to view all of the technical sessions scheduled for a particular day. The session information appears in a printer-friendly

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format and includes brief descriptions of the sessions, their locations and times, and the names of moderators and speakers. As the conference draws near, this information will be updated frequently with cancellations and room changes. Members are encouraged to visit the site often for the latest information.

STC's 50th Annual Conference, to be held May 18-21 in Dallas, Texas, marks an important milestone in Society history. For a half-century, STC has been promoting the arts and sciences of technical communication. In February, STC will launch a Web site devoted to Society history at www.stc.org/stc@50. The site will feature a timeline of important dates in technical communication, juxtaposed with a chronology of developments in science and technology. Visitors will also be able to contribute to a Web log that records memories and reminiscences of their experiences as STC members.

MAKING THE COMPLEX CLEAR AND PRETTY

A Telephone Seminar by Phylise Banner

When: March 12, 2003, 1-2:30 PM EST

Is it enough that information we interact with is clear and concise? Is there some part of human nature that responds to beauty?

Traditional architects use the term "beauty in design" on a regular basis. Drew Hubbell, a commercial architect suggests "beauty in design affects all facets of our lives, enhancing our awareness." What does that mean and how can we apply it to information architecture and design?

Information architects and designers work to find ways to attract users, keep them engaged and move them through data environments. Perhaps by studying the aesthetic tastes of user groups, more functional information displays can be developed.

This seminar will focus on the "beauty" inherent in effective information displays and how to learn from the visual cues that saturate the world around us. During the phone seminar, participants will work through online exercises and be challenged to define how "beauty in design" translates into their own work as technical communicators.

What Is a Telephone Seminar?

A telephone seminar is much like a large conference call where the speaker makes his or her presentation over the phone. You simply dial the 800 number from your phone, enter your personal identification number, and you're connected! You then sit back and listen to the presentations and join in the lively Q&A discussion.

Benefits

- No travel time
- Pay per site and not per person
- Train all your people without their leaving the office

Cost

With a telephone seminar, the cost is per site, not per person. For U.S. sites, the cost is \$145. An additional \$10 will be charged for registrations received less than five business days before the seminar.

Sign-up today! www.stc.org/seminars.asp



WANTED: PROGRESSION LEADERS

by Leanne Logan

Are you getting complimented on your meeting facilitation skills: Could you lead a 20-minute discussion with your peers on a topic near and dear to the hearts of technical communicators: Writing OR Editing OR Document Design OR Project Management? Would you like to learn?

I've facilitated many progressions both at annual conferences and at Canadian chapter meetings—and am offering free coaching. I'll attest to progressions being a fun way to learn something through interactive dialog on focused topics led by a specialist in the field. Stick up your hand and volunteer to be a specialist for a night!

All that's asked of you is that you come prepared with copies of a one-page handout April 7 that:

- Describes or defines the overall topic (e.g., document design)
- Poses a number of thoughtful questions (e.g., Do corporate style guides reduce your creativity as a document designer? OR What's your preferred font for documents distributed online?)
- Offers some references describing a number of sources participants can consult to learn more about the field

At the progression itself, you'll be hosting three different groups of 5-7 attendees for 20 minutes each. Your role as progression table leader will be to introduce the topic, pose questions to generate healthy discussions, and facilitate the experience for the group so that it is a valuable one for all.

If you are interested in volunteering for this opportunity, please drop me an e-mail (llogan@quarry.com), leave me a message at 901.274.0080 before March 15. Trust me, it'll be worth it.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

by Sue Easley

Our newest members are Brandon Marshall, Jill A. Meacham, Wanda C. Powell, and Krista M. Woodlief.

I hope to see you at the next meeting so that we can all meet you personally.

BYLAWS WILL NEED YOUR VOTE

by Nell Johnson

Jackie Walters and I have created the first bylaws for our Mid-South chapter. The Administrative Council has approved them, and you will get your chance to vote them into practice in the upcoming election. Please vote FOR or AGAINST (hopefully FOR!), using the radio buttons on the ballot. A link will provide the entire text of the bylaws so that you can print them and review.

The Mid-South chapter bylaws will be posted soon on our website at <http://www.stc-midsouth.org/>.



UP-COMING ELECTION FOR NEW REGION 3 DIRECTOR-SPONSOR

By Debbie Smith, Member Middle Tennessee Chapter

Beth Tanner is seeking the office of Region 3 Director-Sponsor. In a recent interview with Beth, she shared some of her thoughts about the DS position and why she is seeking office.

The Director-Sponsor is a member of the STC Board of Directors (holding a three-year term) and is each chapter's direct

link to the Society as their voice on the Board. From Beth's perspective, one of the reasons the DS position is so important over the next few years is because our profession continues to evolve—in some ways we are becoming more specialized practitioners and at the same time these specializations continue to cross-over into areas of expertise shared with professionals outside our traditional boundaries. For example, instructional designers and web developers are often members of other societies, but those job functions are part of what we as technical communicators are involved in daily. How this overlap among professional societies plays out over the next few years will greatly impact STC in terms of what it offers members.

According to Beth, the Society office is offering more services to members both directly and through an improved STC website. Even so, the DS is STC's direct link to chapters. The DS is then responsible for informing chapters about important issues before the Board that chapters might want to weigh in. Even with more direct communication available between the Society and local chapters, there will always be a need for personal communication—to articulate and clarify ideas and concerns that will enable members to direct the work of the Society so that it evolves in appropriate ways to support us.

Beth also feels that the DS has the opportunity to bring some connections between chapters in the region—linking chapter leadership and chapter interests within a region. This is more important than ever in our current economic marketplace. Some of the chapters in our area are suffering from slowed economic activity—others aren't. More and more technical communicators are employed by small and medium size businesses and by consulting firms. The ability to share perspectives, tactics, and strategies among "close" colleagues can offer some

opportunities and support that otherwise doesn't exist. "We all benefit personally and professionally when our contributions are recognized and strong—we can help each other if we are connected to each other more directly than most chapters in our region are now."



Middle Tennessee's Beth Tanner is running for Region 3 Director-Sponsor.

Although many STC members know Beth through her STC work over the years, it is important to understand why her background makes her a good candidate for the Region 3 Director-Sponsor position. Beth established Tanner Corporate Services in 1985 and

feels this experience has helped her to "think outside of the box" long before that was a catch phrase. She also has practice at "selling" the skills of technical communicators and adapting those skills to fit the marketplace. Beth was one of the founding members of the Middle Tennessee Chapter of STC and has served her local chapter on all levels. She has served on many committees at the Society level and is an Associate Fellow of STC. She believes in STC and feels she has received benefits from being a part of a strong professional organization. Her "big picture" perspective is grounded in practical business application.

All members who are eligible to vote should receive election materials via e-mail or U.S. mail in March. The election closes April 15, so be sure to review all the materials and vote so that you will have a say in STC's future.

MARCH MEETING REMINDER

What: March program meeting

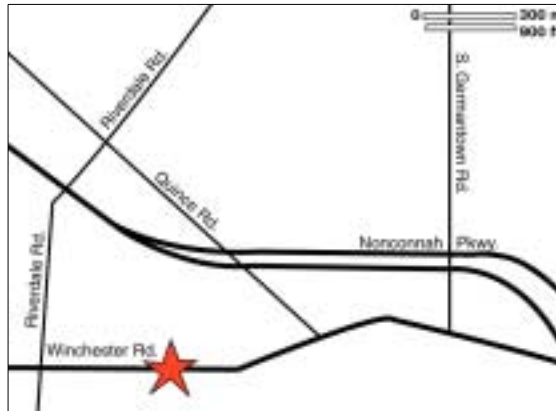
When: Monday, March 3, 6:00 p.m.
Networking dinner starts at 6:00,
program starts at 6:30.

Program: Name Tags: Shoes for the
Cobbler's Kids
(see article on page 2)

Where: Pig'n'Whistle Restaurant
7144 Winchester Road
901.754.4400

Menu: Barbeque buffet with all the
trimmings

Cost: \$10, includes tax and gratuity



Newsbrief

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