



# SQUID

The Newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication Trinite Chapter

SQUID Newsletter

Fall 2006

Issue #1

## STC Hosts Welcome Luau

By Jennifer Bracken and Greg Koch

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) Trinitite Chapter joined forces with the New Mexico Tech Humanities department on August 31, 2006 to say "Aloha!" to a new semester. The STC club held a luau outside Fitch Hall for the students NMT.

Technical Communication professors and students worked hard to make this luau a success, and their efforts paid off. This gathering was a great way for everyone to get to know STC members and humanities department staff. Also, the luau brought awareness of STC to the general public.

The luau was a great success as there were about thirty students in attendance, with several Tech professors enjoying the festivities as well. Visitors dined on Hawaiian pizza, enjoyed Capri Sun drinks, and ate cookies, cake, and doughnuts to celebrate a new academic year. Students who attended the luau were nice enough to support endorsing STC with their signatures. Other activities included a limbo contest; no injuries were reported. A number of attendees were STC members and freshman involved with the



From left to right: Carmelita Wasson and Jennifer Bracken smile for the camera while enjoying the luau.

TC department. Overall, the luau was a great way to start a new semester while meeting new people.

The STC Luau was our first annual welcome picnic with the Humanities department. We thank the Humanities department and we look forward to sharing more with you in the future. Also, thank you to those who attended and those who helped out.

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# What is STC?

STC Mission: *Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.*

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) Trinitite Chapter is a student chapter of the national STC organization. It is the largest organization of its type in the world. STC members include writers, editors, visual designers, and web developers.

Our club is open to anyone interested in advancing their communication skills and networking within the technical communication circle. Society membership provides opportunities for ongoing learning and professional networking. We are dedicated to advancing the art and science of technical communication.

As members of this community, we are committed to the Society's mission of advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication and providing resources for students in both the TC field and in all other disciplines at New Mexico Tech.

We invite you to join our club and see how exciting STC can be for you. For more information about STC or how you can join, please visit one of our websites at <http://trinitite.pbwiki.com/>; <http://stc.org/>; or <http://infohost.nmt.edu/~stc/index.php?content=home>.

## On a tangent... A Message from the President

For the last year and a half, STC Trinitite Chapter has consumed much of my thoughts and time, and I am happy to say that I am ecstatic as to what the chapter has become. The chapter has accomplished quite a bit just in the first half of this semester.

We began the semester by hosting a luau with the Humanities Department on the lawn of Fitch Hall. Although we couldn't light the tiki torches, we had a great turn out of about thirty students and lots of fun playing limbo, eating pizza, and delicious desserts, and getting to know new and returning students.

Another successful event was the Got Style? workshop given by Jennifer Bracken. We had over ten participants attend this workshop. Jen did a fantastic job introducing how to use styles and formatting in Microsoft Word.

I would like to thank everyone who helped with these events, specifically Jennifer Bracken, JW McFarland, Greg Koch, and Ashley Reid. STC Trinitite Chapter could not succeed without individuals like these.

With that being said, I encourage you to become involved in STC Trinitite Chapter if you are not already. Our chapter has the potential to accomplish great things, but these things can not be done without the help of others. There are many areas in which we could use some help. If you excel in any TC related skills, I encourage you to teach a workshop or seminar. If you like to write, you should write an article for our chapter newsletter. You could write about TC-related events, software, books, or internship experiences, just to name a few topics.

If you are wanting to get involved with STC Trinitite chapter, but do not know how, please email [stc@nmt.edu](mailto:stc@nmt.edu) or visit our wiki at [trinitite.pbwiki.com](http://trinitite.pbwiki.com). I believe that STC is a beneficial organization to all TC students and those who are interested in TC. Personally, I have benefited greatly from our chapter, and I'm pretty sure you can do.

~ Carmelita Wasson  
STC Trinitite Chapter President

## Members of STC Trinitite Chapter

### Officers

Carmelita Cereceres Wasson, President  
Jennifer Bracken, Vice President  
JW McFarland, Treasurer  
Tiffany Tadano, Secretary

### Moderators

Dr. Julie Dyke Ford  
Dr. Rick Mott

### Other Folks

Greg Koch, Webmaster  
George Kanesta, Newsletter Editor

# Technical Communication Classes May Fulfill Humanities Requirement

by Carla Hooten

Many New Mexico Tech students do not enroll in Technical Communication (TC) classes because they do not fulfill the Humanities requirement. But that might all be changing.

At the next campus faculty meeting, the faculty will be voting in favor or against allowing TC 151: Introduction to Visual Communication and TC 211: Media Studies to fulfill the Humanities requirement. If the faculty votes in favor, there may be some major changes happening at Tech.

For many years the TC program has been over-shadowed by the science programs, but if these two classes are added to the roster of Humanities requirements, the TC program might be brought out of the shadows. The TC courses may find their enrollment numbers increasing significantly. This in turn may lead to the TC program gaining more recognition around campus.

Another change that may occur is the way Tech students are viewed by employers. Tech graduates have a reputation around the nation for being great scientists and engineers. However, they are not commonly associated with great communication skills. It is likely that the increase in students taking TC courses will also lead to a higher number of students who can effectively communicate their ideas. This in turn has the potential to make Tech graduates more employable.

If the faculty votes to include some TC courses as humanities requirements, the TC program may be unveiled to students other than TC majors. So don't be surprised if you walk into your TC 151 class next semester and find yourself surrounded by science majors.

# Wanted: TC Majors that Speak Geek

by Cynthia K. K. Veitch

Have you heard? An exclusive national scholarship program is recruiting TC majors at New Mexico Tech!

New Mexico Tech is one of only twenty-two universities nationwide participating in the federally funded Scholarship for Service (SFS) program. The SFS program was created in 2000 to recruit and educate the next generation of federally employed information assurance professionals. In the fall of 2003, the SFS program at Tech accepted its first participants—mostly computer science and information technology majors. Since that time, the program has been expanding to include students with majors in mathematics, electrical engineering, and management.

This fall, I was accepted as the first strictly TC major in Tech's SFS program; some of the other participants are pursuing TC as a minor

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# Were Twain and Poe Pulling Our Chains?

by Patrick Smith

Dr. Lynda Walsh, a professor many know from taking one of her classes, published a new book *Sins Against Science: The Scientific Hoaxes of Poe, Twain, and Others*, that came out a couple weeks ago from the State University of New York (SUNY) Press in Albany, NY. In the book she exposes fake science news stories released by the American literary writers in the 1800s. Dr. Walsh writes about not only Edgar Allen Poe, and Mark Twain, but Dan De Quille, and Richard Adams Locke are just a few writers who fooled Americans in the 1800s.

Dr. Walsh answers questions like why these authors went out of their way to fool their readers about fake science and how they managed to do such a feat. Poe wrote a hoax about a balloon that reportedly traveled over the Atlantic Ocean, roughly 140 years before the event actually took place. Poe was not the only hoaxing artist that Dr. Walsh writes about in her book. Twain wrote one such hoax about how a man was petrified sitting up. She explains the struggle between the popular arts and the competing scientific breakthroughs. Walsh is finally asking why all this was going on. Why would these great authors, who had thousands of readers following every book they wrote,...

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# In a Way, TC is Like a Burrito

by Holly Chamberlin

What do babies, burritos, and Colin Mochrie have to do with Technical Communication? According to STC Vice-President Jen Bracken, these are only a few of the odd subjects that arise during a typical Impromptu Thursday meeting. Students meet in MSEC 195 every Thursday at noon to laugh and have fun, all in the name of practicing their public speaking skills. Bracken explains that the meetings help students at Tech practice their public speaking and to become comfortable in front of an audience. “They learn how to ‘speak on the fly,’ meaning they are able to speak without much time to prepare.”

Impromptu is a Speech and Debate event. The speaker then chooses what he or she feels to be the best topic, and has a total of seven minutes to prepare and deliver a speech on that topic. The only rules are no speeches longer than seven minutes and if you eat in the room, you must give a speech before you leave. Each student draws three possible topics from the “Impromptu Jar”—a large plastic container adorned with pictures of the group’s mascot, Colin Mochrie, of ABC’s “Whose Line is it Anyway.” Topics range from paper clips and aloe vera, to quotes from Shakespeare and Albert Einstein, to simply “things that are green.” Each student is given seven minutes maximum to choose one of his or her three selections, prepare, and deliver a speech to the rest of the group. Most students use two minutes to prepare and five minutes to speak. “It’s funny to see what people come up with,” says Bracken. “It forces you to think differently about something mundane. It’s kind of goofy, but fun.”

For example, sophomore Ashley Reid delivered a stirring speech last month about burritos, and how they are really a metaphor for friendship. She explained that a good burrito has potatoes for stability, eggs for protein and strength, jalapenos for spice, and cheese for free-flowing fun, all the things that a good friendship needs. “The meetings are tons of fun,” says Reid. Carmelita Wasson, a senior in the TC program and STC president, describes the meetings as a “challenging way to practice being comfortable in front of an audience. I’m not a good public speaker and the meetings are helping me improve.” Students keep notecards recording their topics, approach to the speech, and speaking times so they can track their progress and look back at what they’ve accomplished.

Bracken participated in similar exercises during her three years of speech and debate in high school. “I saw a definite difference in my speaking skills and was more comfortable in front of an audience. Not being nervous before public speaking helps a lot.” Bracken saw an opportunity to repeat the impromptu speeches through Tech’s STC chapter, but says that students of all majors will benefit from coming to the meetings. “The practice will help in terms of class presentations, job interviews, or even simple question and answer sessions. Almost every job requires you to speak in front of people at some point.”

Until that time comes, students can practice speaking about light-hearted topics while standing in front of a group of peers. “Carmelita’s speech about babies was definitely a classic,” says Bracken. “She took longer than seven minutes, but I didn’t cut her off because her speech was so hilarious.” Drop by the Impromptu Thursday meetings to learn why college education is like a pizza, what Einstein has to say about infinite human stupidity, and the connection between oranges and family. While you’re having fun, you might just improve your own speaking skills.

Impromptu Thursday will be hosted each Thursday from noon to 2 PM in MSEC 195. You may bring your lunch; we’ll bring the topics. Stop by and improve your speech skills while finding a kick from all that is spoken.



Carmelita Cereceres Wasson draws a topic from the “Impromptu Jar” with excitement in order to give a speech.

# Give it a Whirl!

by Angela Rivas

As technical communicators, we can be faced with almost overwhelming learning curves. We may also encounter difficulties defining our job responsibilities. In order to make a smoother transition between one assignment to another, or even one job to another, we really have to take advantage of any and all available resources. Sometimes it can be hard to find a worthwhile resource when such a wealth of knowledge is available; but there is hope – and you may not have to look any further than your inbox!

TECHWR-L (pronounced “Tech-Whirl”) is an online community that offers articles, forums and advice to technical communicators – not only in the United States but worldwide. TECHWR-L offers a discussion list as well as a website where you can obtain information and advice. The discussion list consists of more than 5,000 direct subscribers, but more than 10,000 people are estimated to read the discussions on a daily basis. The website offers articles, features, services and links to resources that make it one of the best online resources for technical communicators.

I never knew that such a valuable resource was available in my inbox, or online for that matter. I have used it for everything from software tips and links to technical writing websites – even book reviews and portfolio advice. I have also found it be an easy and efficient way to stay on top of trends within the field. The wide variety of expertise and interests—from novices, such as myself, to experts in the field—offers readers the opportunity to take part in an active, helpful and positive learning community. TECHWR-L has something to offer everyone – even Dr. Ford noted; “I know I’ve used it as a resource for planning courses and for conducting research”. Beyond the practical advice that can assist you in completing current technical communication jobs, they also have numerous job postings available online, as well as career advice on how to get started as a technical communicator.

TECHWR-L also offers significant networking opportunities, since you can communicate at any time with other technical communicators. After starting a new job as a lone writer, I have referred back to both the discussion list and the website itself for software comparisons, documentation guidelines and even workplace responsibilities. I even took advantage of a unique opportunity to post a request for mentorship on the main site. Keep in mind that these are just a few of the services that TECHWR-L offers.

The final bonus of TECHWR-L seems almost trivial – but is extremely important – it’s free! You can access professional articles, forums, and ask for help from experienced tech writers without having to pay a membership or access fee.

So go ahead and take a whirl - visit the website at <http://www.techwr-l.com/techwhirl/> and subscribe to the mailing list by sending an email to [techwr-l-join@lists.techwr-l.com](mailto:techwr-l-join@lists.techwr-l.com).

# Were Twain and Poe Pulling Our Chains?

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want to deceive the readers? Walsh uses a method modeled from game theory to explain how those readers decided to believe those stories or not.

Walsh wrote this book for people who are interested in how people a hundred years ago read their news. This book is also geared to people who enjoy these authors and had no idea that Poe, and Twain, and other writers could be such great hoaxing artists that they were.

## Upcoming STC Events

Friday, September 22: Squid Newsletter Deadline Submit articles to [gkanesta@nmt.edu](mailto:gkanesta@nmt.edu)

Wednesday, September 27:  
Newsletter Party. Come help put together the newsletter!  
Time: 4 PM  
Place: TC Lab (Fitch Hall)

Saturday, September 30: Deadline for 2006 Southwest Regional PAO Competitions

### October

Saturday, October 28: Trinitite/Kachina Chapter Event at NMT

### November

Thursday, Nov. 2 - Sunday, Nov. 5:  
STC Region 5 Conference, Dallas, TX

Don't forget Impromptu Thursdays!

# Wanted: TC Majors that Speak Geek

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or second major. Unlike most participating universities, Tech accepts SFS applicants from a wide range of disciplines. Majors in the fields of computer science, information technology, management, mathematics, technical communication, electrical engineering, chemical engineering, and physics are all invited to apply. Applicants don't even need a strong background in information assurance to qualify. They need only possess a sincere interest in the information assurance field and the motivation to learn.

Fifteen students are currently participating in Tech's SFS program, four of which were accepted for the fall of 2006. Dr. Lorie Liebrock, Assistant Professor of Computer Science and Information Technology, Adjunct Professor of Management, and the Principal Investigator for Tech's SFS program, expects to award six scholarships for the 2007 academic year. Less than 200 scholarships are awarded nationally per year.

TC majors are desired for their ability to organize, write, and present in the "hard" sciences. As Dr. Liebrock often says, "We need professionals capable of communicating with everyone from geeks to managers." But you need not worry that you will end up writing for other research groups. In Tech's SFS program, TC majors are encouraged to perform research in the areas of policy development and management, usability testing, and process analysis. Of course, if you are interested in implementation you can always pursue that route.

If you've been wondering how you can take advantage of your geek-speaking skills, consider applying for the New Mexico Tech SFS program. In addition to research support, the SFS program provides a number of benefits to participants. SFS reimburses students for tuition and fees, room and board, textbooks, and health insurance. Offices, computers, and equipment are provided for student use. Undergraduates receive a stipend of \$4,000 per semester for a maximum of two years.

To qualify for the SFS program, an applicant must be a U.S. citizen in the last two years of a degree program. Undergraduates must maintain at least a 3.0 G.P.A. and a paid internship is required for participants receiving support for more than one year. SFS support must be repaid with employment by a participating federal agency for a time equal to the period of support. To learn more about the SFS program at Tech, read Dr. Liebrock's article in the September 2006 issue of IEEE Distributed Systems Online (<http://dsonline.computer.org>) or visit the NMT SFS website ([www.cs.nmt.edu/~SFS](http://www.cs.nmt.edu/~SFS)).

## The Last Note

The top 16 things likely to be overheard if you had Klingon technical writers working on your documentation team:

1. Klingons do not sit in meetings, we take what we want and kill anyone who opposes us!
2. Certification?! Taking your head and putting it on a pike in my office is all the certification I need!
3. I will return to the homeworld and my documentation will arise triumphant in the STC Documentation Gauntlet, leaving all others drowning in their own dangling modifiers. It will be glorious!!
4. Not returning my review copies by the agreed deadline is a declaration of war. Indeed, it is a good day to die.
5. These software specifications are for the weak and timid!!
6. This version of Word is a piece of GAGH! I need the latest version of Framemaker if I am to do battle with this manual.
7. You cannot really appreciate Dilbert unless you've read it in the original Klingon.
8. Indentation?! I will show you how to indent when I indent your skull!
9. What is this talk of "drafts"? Klingons do not make document "drafts". Our documents escape, leaving a bloody trail of SMEs in its wake!
10. Passive voice is a sign of weakness. Its elimination will be quick.
11. Proofreading? Klingons do not proof-read. Our documents are purified with pain-sticks which cleanses the documents of impurities.
12. I have challenged the entire Marketing and R&D team to a Bat-Leh contest! They will not concern us again.
13. A TRUE Klingon warrior riddles his document with bullets, leaving it to beg for mercy.
14. By changing the layout of my manual, you have challenged the honor of my family. Prepare to die!
15. You question the worthiness of my grammar? I should kill you where you stand!
16. Our users will know fear and cower before our suite of manuals and online help! Ship it! Ship it and let them flee like the dogs they are!