

TechView

Semester Newsletter for STC-NIU

The NIU Student Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

Event Highlights Alumni Achievements

by Kourtney Kostroski

I'll be perfectly honest: I had no idea what the Society for Technical Communication was two months ago, or that it even existed, but I am glad I found out. I didn't just hear about it through word of mouth and decide to join; something nudged me to join— something a little more eye opening and beneficial to all of us in the writing field. Luckily, a classmate, Shelley Korth (who is a member of STC), gave me a flyer and invited me to come to a panel discussion with some English Department Alumni. I thought it would be a great opportunity to hear from others who have obtained a degree in English, since many of us come out of school worried about where to go next. I went to the discussion to find out encouraging job opportunities available for English majors.

The first panelist was Lindsay Hall, who is a financial assistant at LPL Financial, and who earned her BA in English at NIU in September 2009. Her job is to call service centers and get information on their financial procedures, where she can either meet with the client or write everything down— she expressed that she frequently writes letters (which is where the writing background comes in). Lindsay admitted that she never thought of working in finance while

working on her degree, but once she got the job (which started as a paid internship), she started to love it; she loves working with people and writing letters to clients. When I heard this, I was completely surprised. I didn't think a finance company would even consider hiring a person with a BA in English rather than someone with finance experience, but I was wrong. This is where my ears perked up and I realized there really is a broad scope of jobs for those with English degrees.

The second panelist was Shannon Monson, who earned her BA in English with a minor in Communications from in 2008, and who now works as an editor at American Chamber of Commerce Resources, a publishing company. In her job, Shannon is in charge of 42 annually updated books, where she also coordinates the schedule and discusses chapters with authors, and coordinates time with the printer. Although she said she feels like she's having a "panic attack" most days, she loves her job. I am sure that most of us with English degrees can say that this sounds like a dream job, or at least I can. Shannon

said to be patient when looking for a job; don't settle for something if you're still looking for your ideal career, and keep your eyes peeled— you might just find the job of your dreams where you would least expect it. Shannon found hers on Craig's List,

The third panelist was Hannah Mills, who graduated in 2010 with a M.A. in Rhetoric and Professional Writing, and now works for Follet Higher Education Group; a company that owns college bookstores in the US and Canada. Hannah works as a technical writer at Follet Corp., and recently started editing for the department store of her company. Hannah went on to say that sometimes her job is dull when it comes to the topics she is writing about or editing, but she enjoys working with her peers, and laughing at grammatical errors while editing. Having some past experience as an editor, I could relate to this since, that is one of the perks of being an editor— chuckling at simple mistakes made by authors.

The fourth and final panelist was Jeannine East, who graduated in 1994 with a BA in English from NIU, and also received her Graduate Certificate in Technical Writing in May of 2010. Jeannine is the Vice President of Clientology for a company called Be Found Online. Jeannine said that what her job title really means is that she does almost everything for the

company— she does a lot of different types of writing each day, ranging from proposals, statements of work, content writing for many websites, project management, and she edits almost everything that comes into the office. I was amazed when Jeannine said she has been working for Be Found Online for such a long time, and had the ambition to go back to school and get a Graduate Certificate on top of her job load.

Having attended this panel discussion, I was exposed to the wide spectrum of jobs offered to those in the English field. I benefited from going to this meeting by meeting others in the English Department, and after three semesters at NIU, I needed to branch out and get a better feel for Technical Writing. Joining the Society for Technical Communication was the smartest choice I've made so far. It has given me the chance to work in a collaborative group, and to develop peer relationships with those in the field.

Kourtney Kostroski is a graduate student at NIU studying English.

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Editing for Document Design

by Nina Mancuso

Editing for document design is incredibly important because it makes it easier to find information, so most companies hire editors to clarify their information for the readers. For example, an editor for a website may provide a navigation side bar on the left of the screen with several options so the consumer can find what they are looking for quickly and easily.

However, good design does not just apply to the Web, it can also mean book or pamphlet design. For example, an editor can organize information in a nonfiction book in a clear and logical manner that is consistent throughout the text so the reader knows exactly where to find the information. For instance, if a student is reading a book about archaeological evidence found in one area over time, the book will need several chapters for each time period but with the same information, such as artifacts found and settlement patterns. The editor will arrange the information the same way in each chapter, so naming the time period in the chapter title, then providing subheadings that include settlement patterns and artifacts. When the editor arranges information like this, it allows the student to find where the

information about the settlement patterns are located and where the artifacts are located. However, if the book is not consistent with the information, the student may be forced to search through the entire book to find the information needed. Basically, the book should be consistent with what they mention first and last so the students can expect that in the next chapter they will be able to find the information in the same order as it was in the chapter before.

What this comes down to is that every field needs editors. Every field needs people who can convey information in a clear and concise way for their clients/consumers/patients to understand. Without editors, all documents would be unclear, unfocused, and ineffective. Editors are essential for conveying information not only in professional fields, but in educational texts as well, and without editors, information would be much more difficult to understand and obtain.

Nina Mancuso is a undergraduate student at NIU studying English and Anthropology.

Learning Technical Design

by Sandie Ellsworth

In high school I was a part of the Yearbook team where I first learned technical design through Pagemaker, until my second year when we switched to Adobe InDesign, a more sophisticated program. Technical design is always a good thing to know about when going into the publishing world, even if a person's focus is writing or editing. To gain this edge, it is best to know programs such as Adobe Photoshop, InDesign and, depending on the company, Illustrator. Learning these programs is usually difficult because they are too expensive for most student budget is difficult; most cost around \$300 altogether or around \$200 each from Amazon.com even with the student discount.

A good way for students to learn the programs is to take advantage of campus resources. NIU has the latest versions of these programs in the Reavis computer labs, Neptune North computer lab, and in the internship coordinator's office (Reavis 306A). Photoshop is also in the Art Building labs on the second floor. It's also possible to take a graphic design class offered by the journalism department called Graphics of Communications: JOUR 312. The class takes students through InDesign and Photoshop by working on different projects like an ad, a magazine cover, a magazine four page spread, a newspaper cover, and a newspaper. The class appeals to students with no experience with the programs and to students who have a graphics background.

If you are not a student or do not want to pay for the class, you can always watch videos on YouTube to learn the programs; there are also books, such as *Advanced Photoshop CS5 on Demand* and *Real World Adobe InDesign CS5*. Some

British magazines to reference for tips or different techniques are: *Advanced Photoshop: The magazine for Adobe Photoshop professionals* and *Photoshop creative: The magazine for Adobe Photoshop inspiration and advice*. These magazines can be found at Barnes and Noble or Borders (the ones that are left) for around \$15 each. These magazines usually come with a CD of pictures, used in the examples, and instructional videos.

While these books and magazines are good resources, the best way to learn any program is to open it up and use it with a real project. Some different projects could be helping STC with their newsletter design or seeing if Linda Watson could use any help with *Style*, an academic journal. By working with the programs as often as you can, it keeps the knowledge fresh in your mind.

Works Cited

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Sandie Ellsworth is a undergraduate student at NIU studying English.

Accessible Document Design

by Benjamin Swigget

Have you ever finished reading a document and wondered why the writer made it so complicated to read? Now, imagine yourself trying to read that document with special software that only recognizes text. This is the way a blind person reads a document. Most people probably don't think about accessible documents because they don't need them. However, you must keep in mind who might be reading your documents and how. You can make your document accessible to all people with use of three simple features. These simple features are heading levels, simple color and font schemes, and less reliance on graphics.

To start off, you can use headings. While headings are recommended to make your documents visually appealing, headings can also be used to give a blind or visually impaired person access to your overall design. You can achieve these headings through the style bar. Simply highlight the text you want to make in to a heading, then click the style bar and select either heading level 1 or heading level 2. These heading levels allow someone who is blind to easily move around your documents and to follow your design to find the information they need.

The next thing you can do to make your document accessible is to use a simple coloring and font scheme. You must remember when using color, different people have different visual acuities. You cannot always know what these visual differences are. For example, someone who is totally blind does not need color; while someone who has partial vision might not be able to see different backgrounds. To help lessen this problem you should remember lots of different colors are not always the best. You should stick with two or three colors. You should use colors like white or black. Keep the colors simple don't use colors just because you can, be sure your color uses have a reason. You should also stick with simple font styles and sizes. The more complicated the font the harder it is to read. You should often stick with the default fonts in Microsoft word (Arial, Calibri, Times). Avoid fonts that looks like Chinese characters or are otherwise highly stylized. Another factor that can impact your document is the font size, to help someone who has low vision you might want to use a larger font size of 14 or 16 points. This would depend on if you are setting up a document especially for someone who is low vision. If you don't know if your audience may be visually impaired you can set the size to 12 or 14 points just to be safe.

The most important problem you should watch for in your documents is the use of too many pictures. You must remember if you rely too much on your graphical elements you could exclude a portion of your audience. You should feel free to include pictures because some people use the picture, but if someone is blind for example, they probably cannot see or use your graphics. To get around this, you should include any important points or instructions in your text and use the graphics to back up your text. A good test for this is to look at your document; you should be able to take the graphics out of your document and not be able to lose any

important information. The graphics should just add to your document. Graphics can also cause a problem for someone who has limited vision; some people might not be able to make out a detailed picture., or see colors correctly. The picture might also be too small for some people to make out,

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so if you keep all of your important information in your text you will be able to accommodate everyone.

To conclude, making your documents accessible is not just beneficial to someone with a visual disability; it can also be helpful to a person with standard sight. The headings can make the documents look nice. Also, the simple color and font scheme can make it easier on the eyes and easier to read. Finally, some people just don't like pictures, or they understand textual information better. You might think making accessible documents is more work, but you can make accessible, more professional looking documents with the same amount of work.. If you remember to look at the three simple steps listed above you can make nice looking documents, and you will be sure to maximize your audience potential.

Benjamin Swigget is a undergraduate student at NIU studying English.

STC-NIU offers resources for students considering writing careers

by Cameron Orr

Thank you for your interest in this semester's issue of *TechView*. If you've already been involved with the Society for Technical Communication here at NIU (STC-NIU), then I don't need to tell you about the value of our organization. Unfortunately, the truth is that the majority of undergraduate students, even here in the English department, have no idea that STC even exists, let alone what we do. In fact, I was in my senior year as an undergraduate here before I even heard the phrase "technical communication."

According to Wikipedia, technical communication is the process of conveying technical information to

specific audiences. Put another way, technical communication is using language skills to help other people understand complex information. Technical communicators (those who practice technical communication) can be found in many industries including computer software and engineering, medicine, business, finance, publishing, research, aerospace, mobile communication, and more. These professionals work on manuals, computer help systems, Web sites, and pretty much anything that requires the documentation of complex information.

If you're like me, you've often wondered about what exactly you can do with an English degree. Teaching can be a fulfilling and noble career, but if you enjoy writing and aren't interested in a career in education, I highly recommend you learn what STC is all about by attending our fall kickoff meeting (date and time TBD).

Teaching can be a fulfilling and noble career, but if you enjoy writing and aren't interested in a career in education, I highly recommend you learn what STC is all about by attending our events this fall.

Last semester, we hosted a panel of four alumni of the English department who are now working as technical communicators in various fields (read about it on the front page of this issue!). In previous semesters we've held workshops, planned field trips to joint meetings between STC-NIU and STC Chicago (our parent organization), and

hosted guest speakers on topics ranging from visual design to professional networking. Even if you're not sure that technical communication is part of your career goal, many of the skills that can be learned in STC are relevant to any job that involves writing or design.

For those of you who are already in STC-NIU, or who are interested in joining, I'm looking forward to starting the new

school year with you. If you have any questions about STC-NIU, technical communication, or what you can do with your degree, please contact Professor Jessica Reyman (jreyman@niu.edu) or Linda Watson (lwatson@niu.edu), STC-NIU's advisors. You may also contact me, our chapter's current president, at stcniu@gmail.com. Good luck with your class work this semester; I hope it's a great one!

Cameron Orr
STC-NIU President

Cameron Orr is a graduate student at NIU studying English.

We would love to hear from you!

- Share your knowledge about technical writing, your internships, and your jobs. Send us 250–500 word stories; include photos and other images as appropriate. Your article could appear in *TechView*. Email to the editor at corr1@niu.edu (subject line: TechView News).
- Download a free copy of the *TechView* e-newsletter at <http://stc-niu.wikidot.com/>

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Nina Mancuso
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