

DFWC Mission

Test

The DFWC accepts stories from all LSC members. We encourage all our members to write us articles that will inform and enlighten the Lone Star Community of the advances of the tech writing business. However, we also encourage feature stories that give insights into the accomplishments and lives of our members to increase the feeling of community among LSC.

The DFWC is published nine times a year from September to May to ensure that our members our getting community news monthly. We work to guarantee that members our receiving stories that both give them information to help them in their tech writing careers and inform them of events and members in the community.

Featured Articles

Biology and English Collide: Biology Major Learns How To Succeed in the Real World

Developing with PHP

DSCA Winners Give Insight into Their Goals and Backgrounds

LSC in the Community - More Than a Technical Writing Society

Chapter Achievement Awards

By combining creativity, individuality, and dedication, the competition winners have distinguished themselves in service to the LSC. These award-winning newsletters illustrate the importance of the skills and talents of hard-working, perceptive editors.

The editors, writers, and other contributors to these publications deserve much praise for their time, energy, and perseverance in publishing a quality product.

2004 Excellence

2004 Excellence, Most Improved

2003 Merit, Most Improved

2002 Merit

2001 Merit

Biology and English Collide: Biology Major Learns How To Succeed in the Real World

Chris Feller

April 22, 2007

Course instructor, Dr. Vicki Peake, was shocked the first day she saw the number of biology majors in her Advanced Tech Writing class, a class generally reserved for English and computer science majors.

In an interview with her, she said, "I thoroughly enjoy having the biology majors in my course. Never once do they complain about the amount of work they have to do. Even though they may not be as creative with their writing as the English majors, they are hard workers and will do anything and everything to get the job done. My definition of creativity is far different from a biology major's. English majors tend to be more creative on paper with how they organize their words and phrases. The biology majors exhibit their creativity through their experimental and laboratory work."

Dr. Peake said she knew from the start that teaching students who were not strong writers would not be an easy task, but it was capable of being done. "This course can be useful to any major at UNT. Any field of study, whether it is biology, medicine, business, engineering, or merchandising, requires knowledge of technical communication."

As a biology major at UNT, I was just as nervous about taking a technical writing course as Dr. Peake was teaching a class full of biology majors. Advanced Technical Writing was not my first choice as a class to take, but many biology majors take the class to satisfy their foreign language requirement. I was not excited about the course because I thought there would be tons of writing involved. My strong point does not fall in writing. In fact, I dreaded the course because an advanced English class conjured the thought of many lengthy, tedious papers. However, my attitude changed as I became involved in the course. Dr. Peake taught everything from formatting and designing a resume to creating how-to manuals. All the topics covered really intrigued me because I could actually apply these out in the business world.

The group project we did for designing this newsletter is a great example. The project put us in a real life situation with a client and deadlines to meet. The project required us to present a demonstration of the final product to our client and make them a how-to manual that illustrated how to use the product. While the group project was in progress, each student also had to draft an individual manual of a topic of their choice. English 4180 classes teach students to plan ahead and stay organized so that all projects are completed. The group project, especially, teaches a student how to coordinate their schedule with other students of different majors. In a way, this situation simulates a project that could occur in a real workplace.

After taking this course, I would recommend it to any biology major. Not only is it important that every student be able to write before they graduate, but they should do it in a manner that is clear and concise. Not to mention, it helps eliminate the notion that biology majors cannot produce a paper outside the science realm. Also, no other course in my college career has specifically gone over ways to improve or design a resume. This class gives students advice for the future that they will find valuable as they step out of college.

LSC in the Community - More Than a Technical Writing Society

Michelle LeBlanc

April 22, 2007

The members of LSC unite in their knowledge and passion for communication through corporate advertising, writing, and design. However, this chapter does much more than hide in the literary aspects of a community. To get a better perspective on LSC's many endeavors, I met with Chair of Community Service, Kathryn Poe, to discuss how LSC's presence affects the Dallas/Fort Worth community.

A Background

Kathryn Poe graduated from the University of North Texas with a bachelor's degree in Radio/Television/Film and a minor in English. She began her career in the Technical Writing field 14 years ago and joined the STC 10 years ago. Community Service Chair is far from the only title Poe has taken. In fact, over her 10 year period with LSC, Poe has held the positions of President, First Vice President, Public Relations Coordinator, and Newsletter Editor. This year Poe will receive the rank of Associate Fellow at the International Conference. With such experiences backing her, Poe set out to head the community service aspects of LSC and further expand their outreach opportunities.

A Mission

A lack of organizations to work with has never become an issue since the number of groups needing assistance from organizations like LSC far outnumber the groups available to help. This can become difficult for one to choose which organization will most benefit from the services LSC can provide. Poe does not focus on this aspect, however. Instead, she remarked that LSC chooses the groups to service based on need and accessibility.

Last year, Poe headed an effort to aid students in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina plowed through residents' lives. Poe spoke with an art teacher who struggled to teach art to kids still recovering from the hurricane. However, the art teacher lacked art supplies since supplies were not first priority, so LSC stepped in to help. With the help of Poe and the rest of LSC, the students in New Orleans received two huge boxes of supplies in what was described by the art teacher as being "just like Christmas."

Events and responses like these fuel community service initiatives and the volunteers become especially involved in hands on work. The Salvation Army, NOLA, and many other organizations have become well aware of LSC through their extensive community outreach projects. Kathryn Poe commented that, "While the drives are easier for much of the membership to participate in, the [Salvation Army] Angel Tree [Warehouse] is a favorite." The Angel Tree Warehouse links the Christmas donations received by the Salvation Army to families in need across the DFW metroplex. "Most of us work at desks all day so strenuous activities like moving, sorting, and packing donations are good for the body and the soul. Everyone who has ever participated has felt like it was a great experience."

A Future

Poe and the rest of the LSC have many possible volunteer opportunities; some of which have been previously initiated while others remain in the planning stages. The possibility of LSC providing assistance through book drives and supply donations to a NOLA High School library represents one such event that Poe currently has in logistical stages and hopes to fully initiate in the near future.

Developing with PHP

Jesse Davis

April 22, 2007

When developing a website, there is no shortage of available languages to use. A language, in this sense, is the genre of code used. A new language is always being released, or already established languages are being updated. Since there are so many options available, your choice is usually affected by your familiarity with a given language and what you are trying to accomplish with your site. For me and this site, www.trepid.net/engl4180, that choice was to use PHP.

About PHP

PHP is an interpreted, server-side, scripting language. PHP comes with a huge library of functions for accomplishing any number of tasks. Access to such a large library of functions allows me to spend time developing, instead of trying to figure out and create my own functions that do the same menial tasks. A code library is similar to a real world library; these libraries are collections of organized and developed codes to help solve a particular type of problem. Other languages, such as C and C++, do have extensive libraries available to them, but it can be difficult to find a library that provides a solution. Those libraries also come at the cost of potentially bloating your program with a huge library when you only need to use a handful of the functionalities it provides. Compiled languages like C++ have programmers concerned about those things for the user. PHP takes my mind off of that side of programming and allows me to invest my time in a more worthwhile manner.

PHP Advantages

Another advantage for developing with PHP is the integration the language has with MySQL databases. A MySQL database is like any other database in that it stores information, but the advantage comes with the ease of use when partnered with PHP. Using PHP, I can develop a content-dynamic backend with a great deal of ease. I do not have to use a clumsy command window interface to look at the status and structure of a given database. As a matter of fact, there are PHP-developed utility sites that allow for a very user-friendly way to interact with a MySQL database.

To create an effective site, both the webmaster and the users need this interfacing of site frontend and backends. The advent of "Web2.0" has made everyone's expectations of a site higher than what they were five or ten years ago. Static site and static content are a thing of the past, and users want a site they can interact with. This particular site doesn't quite fit that description, but the management of the site can still be simplified with a content-dynamic system. Again, database support is absolutely available in a great deal of other languages, but the simplicity by which it is accessible in PHP is highly desirable.

PHP Support

The amount of support for PHP is also quite impressive. The official PHP manual is readily available online at the PHP website (www.php.net). The online PHP manual allows for users to provide helpful comments for the entire PHP library. Imagine your car's owner manual filled with procedures and tips from mechanics, and you will have an idea of the PHP manual's usefulness.

General ease of use is perhaps the largest appeal PHP has for me. The huge library mentioned earlier is great, but the simple approach of the language is undeniable. You do not need to have a strong programming background to understand PHP. A primary strength of languages like C and C++ is that you have such unfiltered access to solve your problems. Those types of languages give the programmer a lot of control over how he/she wants to perform or manage a particular situation. The cost of doing these things comes at a huge learning curve. It takes an enormous amount of time to learn how to use those languages to your advantage. Using PHP, you do not have to worry about garbage collection, memory management, user system dependency, and so on. I believe you could take anyone with no formal programming education and teach them to use PHP in a few hours.

So In Conclusion

You can use this language to do a great number of things, and do them quickly and easily, but there are some goals that are outside the scope of PHP. This is why I mentioned that the language used also depends on the goals for the website. For me, I knew I wanted to develop a dynamic site that was driven by a simple backend for creating the content. I knew that PHP was capable of the things I want to accomplish for this site, and I am more familiar with PHP than the other available server-side languages. My main goal was to develop a site that was simple to use and the "work" of the site was transparent to whoever manages the site. I did not want the newsletter editor and staff to worry about if their HTML syntax was correct, if they accidentally removed something when copy & pasting, what files to update, and so on. I wanted to make a site where the editor only needed to worry about the content, and not how to handle content.

DSCA Winners Give Insight into Their Goals and Backgrounds

Katie Wilson

April 22, 2007

The members of LSC pride themselves on the services they provide to their community and the work they do throughout the year. However, there are always those few members who stand out, who go above the call of duty to help their community. This year those members were Jackie Damrau, Jeanne Foster, and Paul Holland, who all received the Distinguished Community Service Award (DCSA).

When she received her award Damrau said "I was very shocked. LSC has awarded me several awards this year, such as the BALA (Binion Amerson Leadership Award) and the DCSA. I'm pleased that the LSC members, its Administrative Council, and Leadership team feel that I am worthy of so many awards and honors. Without them, I wouldn't be as involved as I have been and continue to be."

The award winners perform many duties for LSC and volunteer as much time as they can to better the community and its services. All the winners contribute to the society in different sections to make the community work as a whole.

"I am the Managing Newsletter Editor for Technically Write, the LSC monthly newsletter. I've also served during the 2006-2007 year as the STC 2006 Region 5 Conference Chair and as Competitions General Manager. I probably spend about 5-8 hours a week in getting items together for the newsletter," Damrau said.

"As the Hospitality chair, I handle registration for the monthly meetings and report attendance figures to the council. In addition, I volunteer as a copyeditor for the LSC newsletter, Technically Write. I worked on the Region 5 Conference that was held last November, and that was a big commitment. But I'm currently just working on the monthly registrations and reviewing newsletter articles," Foster said.

"I am a senior member and currently work on the LSC web committee and the Marcomm Special Interest Group web site. I answer to the web team manager and the president of the local community," Holland said.

All of the award winners give a large amount of time to the community and are continually grateful for the opportunities LSC gives them.

"The LSC functions at a high level of professionalism and has an extraordinary level of talent. It is a great place to learn and to contribute. Professional development is an essential component in any profession and, in the technical communications community, the STC is the premier organization for technical communicators. Furthermore, the LSC is a perennial contender for the Award of Excellence within the STC. The LSC is the best of the best," Holland said.

The award winners also participate in helping the community outside of LSC, including contributing to volunteer activities and going to universities around the area to reach students interested in technical writing.

"LSC routinely offers opportunities to give back to the community, for example, by volunteering at the Salvation Army Angel Tree warehouse, contributing to projects that aid Katrina victims, and other local causes. This group has some wonderful role models, and I get much more than I could possibly give," Foster said.

The DCSA winners do not show any signs of slowing down after winning their awards, though. They are already setting goals they want to achieve for next year.

"My goals include: redesigning Technically Write (with the assistance of the University of North Texas English class) to be a truly online newsletter that does not use an authoring software; providing hands-on workshops or seminars where members can bring a laptop and learn from peers and others about the latest software; continuing to support the Competitions Committee by volunteering to serve as a judge or competitions manager," Damrau said.

"Next year, I will chair the Membership committee where I hope to learn from Elisa Miller (who moves to the First Vice President slot) and expand on the work of those who came before me. My goal is to find additional ways of increasing membership and increasing attendance at LSC meetings and events," Foster said.

"Last year we initiated several web-based initiatives for the community, which have not gone smoothly. I would like to see the implementations of several of those initiatives completed satisfactorily," Holland said.

These award winners recognize the benefits of this community and they continue to encourage others interested in the tech writing profession to join so their community can continue to grow and help others.

"Attending a meeting or two doesn't give you the full flavor of whom and what we are. We are more than just dinner meetings. We have so many other programs that can use volunteers with new and fresh ideas to spur our growth. I continually try to encourage everyone to talk with their employers about the benefits of belonging to STC," Damrau said.

Incoming President Sets Goals for the Year

Susie Fox

April 22, 2007

As President of the STC Lone Star Community (LSC) for the 2007-2008 program year, let me be the first to say, "Welcome, everyone! You are our community individually and collectively. Without you, we wouldn't be who we are. You make a difference!"

We have a wonderful year planned for our members, students and guests! This summer your council has been reviewing lessons learned, planning long-term strategies and training folks for new volunteer jobs. If you're interested in helping make it all happen, please see our Past President and Volunteer Wrangler Mel Haughton.

Our First Vice President Elisa Miller is gearing up for a year full of interesting and informative programs. I am looking forward to all of us meeting and greeting old and new friends and enjoying the many extra initiatives that make LSC such a distinctive community!

In 2007-2008, I envision us continuing to benefit from the rich legacy of LSC's distinguished history and traditional programs and events. At the same time, I would like us to nourish the emerging focus on students, mentoring and education that kicked off in 2006-2007. See Past President Mel Haughton's column that so aptly summarizes last year's amazing whirlwind of accomplishments and great ideas.

Personally speaking, the whirlwind started early for me when I volunteered to help the council in April 2006. The offer to help translated into serving as First Vice President in charge of programs. As a fairly new member since 2003 and as a brand new officer and council member, I had lots to learn and lots of great folks to learn from at every turn. What a blessing they all are!

Honestly, there were times that I felt like I'd been literally ejected out of my comfortable seat at the monthly dinner meetings and fully immersed into the inner workings of the LSC council. The result is that I've been through quite a transformation process and am still learning.

Volunteering is a great way to get to know others, to learn new skills, and to benefit from your STC-LSC membership. The most important things I've learned are that we are a community, that we make things happen together, and that there is always someone available to help.

I continue to be delightfully amazed by the diverse talents, abundant energy, and professionalism of the LSC officers, committee managers, volunteers, members, students, and soon-to-be-named SuperStars who are the LSC experience!

I still have much to learn from each and everyone one of you so I'll be listening for your ideas and input! Have a great summer!

Newsletter Takes on New Look and Other Upcoming Events and Changes

Jackie Damrau

April 24, 2007

Thanks to the Vicki Peake's English 4180 students at the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton, the Summer issue of Technically Write is taking on a new look. I encourage you to explore this issue and send your comments or suggestions to me at newsletter@stc-dfw.org. Letters to the Editor are always welcome as it helps the Newsletter Committee in providing you with the content that you want to read about.

In this issue...

In this issue, you'll find:

- Outgoing president, Mel Haughton, and our incoming president, Susie Lynn Fox messages.

- A feature article from the winning UNT students about their project.

- Post-conference review sessions from LSC members who attended.

- Photo gallery of your newest LSC Associate Fellows and Fellow, as well as the rest of us in our strangeness.

- Local and Regional News with information about the 2007-2008 program year.

Planning the September issue...

This will be the first issue of the new membership year, so I'll be looking for your "back to school (or work)" or "vacation" stories. Of course, technical articles, how-to articles, and book/software reviews are always welcome.

Until next time...

2006-2007 in Review

Melissa Haughton

April 22, 2007

When I look back at our laundry list of things accomplished this year, I'm quite speechless. I'm going to list as many as I can in this article. Remember that I didn't do this alone. I had a wonderful council of amazing people behind me. Without all these wonderful people, the LSC would not be what it is today.

Organized a Successful Region 5 Conference

We successfully organized the Region 5 Conference in November 2006. We had 118 attendees, and we made \$2,411.77. During the Conference, we held a silent auction to raise scholarship funds. Several vendors donated products, and we raised \$1,300 in scholarship money.

Provided Educational, Scholarship and Mentoring Opportunities

We awarded five \$1,000 scholarships to area students in the fall semester. In addition to the traditional scholarship we have offered for so many years, we developed another scholarship: the Continuing Education Scholarship. We also revived our mentoring program and worked in conjunction with University of North Texas (UNT) students to create a new mentoring brochure.

We revitalized our relationship with UNT. Four classes worked on projects for us in the fall semester. Two classes worked on an internal portal (like an intranet) for council members and a brochure that markets our mentoring program. One class redid our Standard Operating Procedures. And another class is writing a manual on how to run a successful conference. During the spring semester, two classes helped us. One created a template for our online newsletter, and another redesigned our membership packet. Whether we end up using what the students created or not, this is still a great opportunity for us to teach them about STC and for them to have a real-life client for class projects.

On January 31, we also sponsored a brown bag session on ePortfolios at UNT. Past President Louellen S. Coker taught UNT technical writing students how to put together a portfolio. This event also allowed us to advertise our mentoring program. Fifteen students attended the event.

Our council members worked closely with Mr. Donny West, technical writing lecturer at the University of Texas at Dallas. His students interviewed our council members to find out what we do every day as technical communicators.

The LSC also served as a Corporate Sponsor for the Dallas BEST competition. We provided judges for the competitions' technical binder evaluation and gave a monetary award for first, second and third place to three area schools.

Held Successful Competitions and Award Banquet

We held successful competitions and Jackie Damrau did a great job as Competitions Manager. Our Awards Banquet in January had more than 60 attendees. It was a lively night.

Organized Fun Events

We organized several networking luncheons and happy hours. On July 13, 2006, we also had our first ever Meet 'n' Greet, where Clare Davis, Vice President of M-Link Technologies, shared with the audience the four critical success factors of e-learning. This was a free meeting for everyone, and we held it at La Madeleine (where we usually hold our council meetings). We were impressed by the amount of people who came! We were expecting about 15, and 31 people showed up. It was great! We're planning on having more meetings like this next year!

Heather Steele, incoming Second VP, also organized a Mixer in Denton on March 21, 2007, for UNT students to meet Technical Writing Professionals. We all know technical communicators love happy hours!

Recognized Our Wonderful Volunteers

We awarded three Distinguished Chapter Service Awards this year to Jackie Damrau, Jeanne Foster, and Paul Holland.

We also created the Binion Amerson Leadership Award (BALA), which recognizes enthusiastic dedication, willingness to accept challenging goals, and inspiring leadership in service to the Lone Star Community. LSC members may nominate a community member through a written description of his or her achievements relative to the Award criteria, after which a panel of judges will identify the BALA recipient. In May 2006, we awarded this honor to Binion Amerson himself. During the Region 5 Conference, the BALA was awarded to Jackie Damrau for her outstanding contributions to the LSC.

We also developed the LSC Superstar program. We worked with the Orlando Chapter to create a point system and praise our volunteers. From August 1, 2006 to June 1, 2007, members received points each time they participated in LSC activities. Points are based upon the activity and their point values. A member needs a total of 20 points to be an LSC Superstar. We'll total up points and those who have reached 20 will be awarded a very special LSC shirt at the September 2007 meeting. Members may not purchase or order this unique shirt.

Provided Member Value

We had nine very successful programs in 2006-2007. From return on investment to usability and presentation techniques, all of our meetings were well attended.

We also created the LSC Help Desk, which is located at <http://www.stc-dfw.org/HelpDesk/index.php>. The Lone Star Community is blessed with many senior members who have wide and varied backgrounds. The Help Desk is a new way to leverage all that knowledge and help us solve problems. It's like a forum, where only LSC members can join to share information. Kathryn Poe is currently moderating the site. The LSC is a rich resource, and this is a great way to share our knowledge.

Our Job Bank continues to hop. We also developed an e-postcard that we send quarterly to recruiters who have posted jobs at our site. The e-postcard reminds recruiters of our free job posting services and asks them to visit our website. We're hoping to increase traffic on our website with this tactic. Our PR, Job Bank, and Webmaster committees worked hard to see this through.

Our Newsletter continues to receive awards and recognition nationwide. Every month, Jackie Damrau, who took over as newsletter editor in January, wows us with new technologies and resources. You can access the newsletter for our website at www.stc-dfw.org.

Conclusion

This was an outstanding year. We have a wonderful team of officers who is gearing up for a new program year, and I am positive that you'll have more amazing experiences in the year to come.

It has been my pleasure to be your president this year. I learned a lot, and I met some amazing people. As LSC members, we have great resources at our fingertips. All we have to do is use them. Thanks for a wonderful year, and I can't wait to see what Susie has in store for us next year!

Have a great summer!

