



WriteUp



A Message from the President

By Lynette Pittman

In May, the Suncoast chapter sent me to the Annual Conference. As I previously reported, one of the main points I brought back from that conference was that we must involve members more fully, whether through special interest groups or through more innovative use of volunteers. Another was that we must let industry know who we are. At our planning retreat in July, our Administrative Council went to work turning those ideas into programs. The rest of this article is a brief summary of how we are working to make our Suncoast chapter one of the very best, and how you can help with that effort.

One of the first things you may have noticed is a great schedule of meetings. We hope that every member will find something of interest in those meetings and will not only want to come to the meetings, but also bring guests. If you have ideas on other meeting topics and/or speakers, contact Mark Lewis. You can also help out by attending a meeting, then writing a short article about it for the *WriteUp* – and get the next meeting free. Contact Lou Martindale for those details. Want to help set up the food for a meeting? Sara Cavallo would love to hear from you.

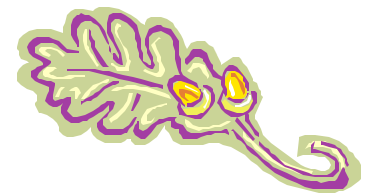
We will be announcing the details about a workshop soon, and of course, will need people to help with it as well as attend it. Stay tuned for more on that.

The call for entries in another Florida Technical Communication Competition (FTCC) has gone out. We would love to have your manuals or online help as entries, or you could help out with the event. Contact Barbara Diorio for more on how you can be involved.

We have stepped up our outreach to students at local campuses. The campus coordinators for USF/Tampa (Pam Treme), USF/St. Pete (Dina Stenz), and University of Tampa (Joanna Castner) would love to hear from you and get you involved with the students at these campuses.

Dina Stenz is launching a great publicity program which will include a brochure for employers, a chapter brochure, and other publicity efforts. Why not contact her and see how you could help let the rest of the world know what a great chapter we have?

All the administrative council members are listed on page 3 of this newsletter, so you can contact any of us for more on how to get involved. In the end, the most successful chapter is the one that has the most involvement from its membership. We can't do it without you!❖



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WriteUp

Editor

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WriteUp communicates Suncoast chapter and Society news six times per year for the benefit of members and friends of the Suncoast chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

Submissions

WriteUp invites writers to submit articles to be considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter or e-mail, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Meeting write-ups, feature articles, and software/book reviews are encouraged (approximately 800 words). Preferred formats include MS Word e-mail attachment or text in the body of your e-mail message. All submissions are subject to editing. Deadline for submission is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

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From the Editor

By Lou Martindale



Fall ... cool days, crisp nights, falling leaves ... Not if you live in Florida! Fall could be called the season of preparing. Preparing for the holidays; preparing for the end of the year; preparing for the new year. For the Suncoast chapter, it means preparing for a year of exciting chapter meetings and speakers, preparing for the membership drive, preparing to attend the annual conference by getting the funds appropriated now for next year's budget, preparing to enter FTCC, preparing to enter the newsletter competition, preparing to enter the chapter achievement award, preparing, preparing,

In case you thought you missed it, there was not an issue of WriteUp in July/August (your editor took a summer vacation).

The second and final installment of Mark Hanigan's article, "Twenty Years of STC, Past and Future," begins on page 4. This installment contains his predictions and observations for the next ten years. The first installment was in the May/June 2003 issue.

Thank you goes to Sunny Zengler and Nermina Miller for writing chapter meeting reviews. Nermina has written several excellent reviews. If you would like to write a meeting review and receive a certificate good for a free future meeting, watch for the announcement on the listserv approximately one week before the meeting.

There are some changes in this issue. Page 3 has a new column devoted to news about and for our students. Chapter News has been moved to the last page, so that it appears on the same page as our meeting information. This issue has been formatted with most of the articles in a single column. This is in response to feedback I received suggesting multiple columns are difficult to read on a computer monitor due to the scrolling required. Please let me know what you think. Is one column easier or is the multiple column preferred. The joy of word processors is that we can easily keep tweaking the layout until it suits almost every one.

I have noticed when I print out newsletters in PDF from a few other chapters that my printer isn't able to handle some of the font types and I get strange results. Please let me know if you are having that problem with WriteUp.

I am looking for a person(s) to take over as editor of the newsletter. Ideally, the incoming editor would work with me on one or more issues beginning in the spring. If you are interested in this position, please contact myself or Lynette Pittman.

I hope everyone had a great summer and is looking forward to some cooler, drier fall weather. ❖

Sponsors

The STC Suncoast chapter welcomes corporate sponsorships to help defray costs for our educational programs, publications, and annual FTCC. Corporate sponsors increase awareness of their businesses among the Tampa Bay area technical communicators. For more information, go to our Web site at <http://www.stc-southeast.org/suncoast/sponsors.htm> ❖



Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

Society News

The members only section of the Society Web site (<http://www.stc.org>) is a valuable source of information. To access the members only section, you will need your STC membership number and password. The 2003 Salary Survey is now available in this section. If you are looking for a job, check the Job Database also located in the members only section.

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To promote and advance the technical communication profession in the Suncoast area and support the professional development of technical communicators, current and future.

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It's not too early to begin planning for next year's 51st annual conference, Navigating the Future of Technical Communication, in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 9–12, 2004. This is the time of the year when many corporations are preparing their annual budgets for 2004. See if you can get your conference expenses included in the budget. Page 33 in the September issue of the *Intercom* has preliminary information regarding the conference. ❖

STC Membership

October kicks off the annual STC membership drive. New members may fill out a membership application or existing members may renew your membership online at <http://www.stc.org>. ❖

As of August 31, 2003

Suncoast chapter members	142
(Includes 63 senior and 8 student members)	
Total Region 3 members	1,556
Total STC members	19,461
Members residing in the U.S.	16,626
Members residing in Canada	1,764
Members residing elsewhere	1,071
Total number of Special Interest Groups (SIGs).....	21
Total number of chapters.....	153
(Includes 35 student chapters)	

Student Corner

This space will be devoted to activities, announcements, awards, events, etc. specifically for our student members. Three regular members have volunteered to be the Campus Coordinator for a particular campus. Their contact information is listed below.

Since 1971, STC has fostered the growth of the profession by awarding scholarships to students enrolled in technical communication programs at universities, colleges, junior colleges, and technical schools. Since the program's inception, the Society has awarded nearly \$360,000 to deserving students. For more information go to http://www.stc.org/grants_loans.asp.

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Twenty Years of STC, Past and Future

By Mark Hanigan, past president of the Society and the Suncoast chapter

As I alluded to in the first installment published in the May/June issue, and as the saying goes “Fools rush in ...”, I’m going to offer three predictions for the next ten years. By then, maybe I will be retired. (Dream on, Mark; you are much too young!)

Prediction #1: “The Paperless Society Will Finally Come to Be”

Hmmm; we have been hearing that one for at least the past ten years. It would go something like, “In five years, we will be a paperless society.” I thought that Dr. Frank Romano (author of, among other titles, International Paper’s *Pocket Pal*) countered it best when he quipped, “So long as there is paper in the bathroom, there will be paper in the library.”

Well, all kidding aside, we have been slowly evolving towards a quasi-paperless society. But the evolution has been generational. Why do I say that? Anyone from my generation or perhaps even a bit younger still prefers to “hold the pulp.” It does not mean that we are against reading things online. But it seems if there is any volume, people of my ilk reach for that Print button. This is codified by another of Dr. Romano’s observations that printing has not gone out of vogue; we have just shifted printer locations from one source to millions of sources.

Now any of you who are among the newer generation of technical communicators (or who have teenagers) know that the younger folks do not seem to have any adverse effects using their computer monitors like a book. With the advent of PDAs, one literally has the capability of carrying volumes of reading material in one neat little package.

Companies rarely provide paper documents with their products anymore. Probably the only types of paper documentation that still get produced en masse are getting started guides, installation instructions, and perhaps quick reference guides and job aids.

Now this does not mean that other document types are not still created; they are. Things like maintenance manuals, training materials, and reference tomes still get created in paperlike format (pdf format remains a popular delivery mode). This lends credence to Dr. Romano’s second observation.

The question remains whether this next generation of technical readers will remain loyal to online formats. Certainly, random search capabilities often make them the better choice, even for those of us who read through lenses (I’m personally wary of lasik surgery). However, there are compelling reasons to continue down the paperless avenue. Technical audiences continue to become more diverse in terms of languages (translated, global marketplace) and in terms of educational level (translated, pictures are becoming more critical for dissemination of technical information).

So in conclusion on this prediction, the trend will continue. I do not think it will become 100 percent in my lifetime, unless economics make silicon soooo much cheaper that paper disappears almost completely. If that happens, look for me at the antique library!

Of course, all of this segues nicely into my next prediction nicely!

Prediction #2: “How We Do Our Job Will Continue To Change Dramatically”

Things have changed dramatically on several fronts. To me, some of them are cool and some are disturbing.

First, in the “cool” arena, we continue to put the “technical” into technical communication. The “upsized, downsized, rightsized” economic recession of the early 1990’s brought an end to the era where a technical communicator could make a living by specializing in just the language. Most of us adapted by learning not only our craft, but the technologies behind producing our products and the technology behind the products themselves. In today’s corporate environment, those of us who have technology skills and specialization in at least one industry have advantages over those of us who do not.

This trend will continue. More and more, we are required to wear more “hats” in our work. These include project managers, business process re-engineers, methodologists, unified content strategists, instructional designers, and trainers. The short shelf life of most products and the concurrent pressures to get things to market right away will continue to fuel this trend.

(Twenty Years continued on page 5)

(Twenty Years continued from page 4)

This, unfortunately, has a disturbing side-effect. Frankly, our language is evolving in a way that I consider “going to the dogs.” Already, the once unbroken rules about split infinitives and dangling participles have gone by the wayside. (I know what you are thinking – “Yeah, Mark, so has the concept of limiting the use of idiomatic expressions.” I can’t help it; I take to them like a fish to water!)

Businesses no longer place as much of a premium on well-written prose and proper grammar usage. I suspect that this trend will continue, since more and more of our audiences do not notice the differences.

This brings me to my last prediction for this time around.

Prediction #3: Our Job Market Will Rebound And Evolve In Some Very Different Ways; STC Will Evolve Too

Unless our current economy collapses completely, the job market will rebound. My limited barometer of noticing the number of technical communication and training positions posted indicates that the rebound has already taken perhaps a toe-hold.

Even so, do not expect the salary and bill rates that we were earning in the late 1990’s to reclaims as quickly. First, a very quiet and permissive trend continues in that more and more of our corporations are moving development (and documentation) efforts overseas, where corresponding economies of scale permit them to pay much lower rates.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I am not espousing Nationalists sentiments. I am simply reporting a provable trend. I suspect that, in the long run, things will level off. For one reason, costs required to correct products (including documentation) before they can go to markets have eroded much of the savings that were first realized. For another, with more and more global economic coalitions being formed (e.g., NAFTA, EMU), the pockets of “bargain labor” will eventually dry up.

Provided that the new global economy that emerges offers us all opportunities, this is not a bad thing! If STC recognizes these trends and moves to be a part of them, then I believe that a very new and even stronger STC will evolve.

Our organization is recognizing the dramatic changes in the needs of its membership. Over the past ten years, we have seen the birth and growth of our Special Interest Groups (SIGs). The evolution of the Internet, list-servs, and Web sites enables us as technical communicators to literally share with our colleagues all over the world.

One of the interesting trends that I do not have a prediction for will be the changing of conferences. With the costs of attending these types of activities falling more and more on our shoulders (by the way, we should all be responsible for our own continuing education!), and with the current fears and inconveniences associated with air travel, people are not flocking to conferences the way that they used to do.

I fervently hope that this trend is short lived. Regardless of the technologies, to me, nothing takes the place of quality face time with friends and the opportunities to learn about things in a classroom setting. Human contact cannot be replaced by technology, at least for a society in which I would want to live [or, for you “grammar peasants”, in a society that I would want to live in. (Just kidding all!)].

Well, this wraps up my reflections on the past ten years and my predictions for the next decade. Thanks for taking the time to allow me to share my thoughts with you. If you want to share any back with me, please drop me a line at onwritetrk@aol.com.

Until 2013!

Kind regards,
Mark Hanigan,
Suncoast chapter (way, way ...) past president ❖

July Chapter Meeting Review

By Sunny Zengler, Suncoast member

Creating Effective User Surveys

Presented by Karen Bachmann, past Suncoast president

As always, I was totally impressed with the breadth and scope of Karen Bachmann's presentation at the July meeting. Her topic was *Creating Effective User Surveys* and she gave us our money's worth!

I found out that creating an effective survey is like life: you need to know what you want to get *out* of it before you can figure out how to *get* it. Several behind-the-scenes events have to happen before you start. First and foremost is defining your ultimate goal: gathering information that helps you change your product, delivery or what you're seeking to know. In order to do this, you must define your method of inquiry and develop it. The most commonly used method of information gathering is the survey: a planned method of finding something out. The typical sequence of information gathering is:

1. Deciding to do a survey
2. Writing some questions
3. Circulating internally for comment
4. Revising
5. Administering
 - By e-mail to everyone
 - By pop-up window to every site visitor
 - By including in every manual

However, we found out that the typical method isn't necessarily the most effective or desirable. Using interviewing or a questionnaire could potentially serve you better. A questionnaire is a formal series of questions, sometimes with choices for answers. An interview is a planned discussion of a topic. Some of the advantages of doing interviews are the fluidity and interactivity possible. The most obvious disadvantage is that you can only do very small samples of your potential audience. The main advantage of a questionnaire is that it supports very large audience sampling. The disadvantages are more numerous: no interaction with audience; written answers can be restrictive in response; a questionnaire is inflexible in the questions it provides—it may not be what the audience wants to tell you at all.

Speaking of what audiences want to tell you, there are actually relatively standard characteristics of the people who will participate in surveys: those who love to do surveys; those who love freebies (if you give something away for completing a survey), and those who HATE your product and can't wait to tell you so. You really have no way of knowing who is answering your survey and what their biases are.

There are definite times NOT to do a survey as well: when you haven't defined end users of your product; when you use a method of survey that doesn't match the time available (if you're not going to change the product anyway before market, don't ask consumers for their input), and when you can't do anything with the results.

There are three major factors that will improve the response you get from doing a survey:

- Establish trust
- Increase perceived rewards to the users
- Reduce the social costs

To establish trust with your users, show appreciation upfront AND at the end; make the survey seem important to the user and indicate other opportunities in the future for the user to benefit. When it comes to users' rewards, immediacy is an important factor. Emphasize what's in it for the user, show respect for the user, and make the survey interesting. Reducing social costs means to respectfully request answers rather than demand participation; make questionnaire short and easy, but not

(Creating Effective continued on page 7)

condescendingly so; and request meaningful demographic information only—avoid gathering personal information that will stifle participation.

Perhaps one of the subliminal methods of establishing the above factors is to provide easy access to an exit option. We all feel more secure knowing we can leave at any time. This is true with surveys as well. Discussion was stimulated by the topic of inclusion of a privacy statement for the users. It was noted that financial and medical surveys must contain such a statement, and it is considered best practice to include such a privacy statement in all surveys.

There are ten steps to a user survey, subdivided into three areas:

- I. Preparation
 - 1. Set goals
 - 2. Decide on target groups
 - 3. Interview target users
- II. Production
 - 4. Create content
 - 5. Decide on delivery
 - 6. Test
- III. Revise for final survey
 - 7. Delivery
 - 8. Conduct
 - 9. Compile and analyze responses
 - 10. Publish results

To summarize: setting your goals for the survey is the most important step, even though, quite often it is omitted. Your goals must be as precise as possible. Another primary inclusion to any survey should be an "anything else?" essay option. And when you decide you want to do a survey of your user groups, contact Karen Bachmann at Karen@seaconinc.com ❖

Suncoast Chapter STC Financial Report 7/1/2002—6/30/2003		
Starting Balance 7/1/2002		\$6,791.05
Income:		
Dues refund from Society		\$ 4,879.50
Chapter meetings		2,133.23
FTCC		2,807.74
Misc. (Workshop, Web Host)		2,004.42
Total Income		<u>\$11,824.89</u>
Expenses:		
Administration	\$ 5,872.12	
Chapter meetings	4,425.44	
Newsletter	663.04	
FTCC	2,414.49	
Misc. (Student chapter, Storage)	963.54	
Total Expenses	<u>\$14,338.63</u>	
Ending Balance 6/30/2003		\$4,277.31

August Chapter Meeting Review

By Nermina Miller, student member

Knowledge Management

Presented by Dr. Dan Jones, Professor of English, University of Central Florida

Epistemology has puzzled thinkers since the day the human mind began making purposeful connections. How knowledge is acquired, shared, and used is the question that has always been pivotal for achieving a certain goal, and it most certainly is one of the major preoccupations of major businesses today. Managing knowledge thus has always been the defining part of the human destiny. It is clear that success or failure of any company depends much on how knowledge is managed. At the core of the prototype for a smash hit in today's globalizing economy are professional communicators, those intelligent people who have been on a crossroads between several disciplines for the choice of their career but who decided to learn it all and tell about it.

Something that has been eternalized but not categorized until recently is what Dr. Dan Jones calls a "new paradigm shift in the way we define ourselves." The concept of knowledge management has developed into a new discipline over the past ten years, and according to Dr. Jones who presented in front of the Suncoast chapter on August 7, "We have redefined ourselves over the same decade in ways that help us contribute meaningfully to knowledge management as well as other challenges and opportunities."

Distinguishing between information and knowledge, Dr. Jones quoted a collaborative work of Edward Sallis and Gary Jones ("Knowledge Management in Education" 2002, p. 8) as saying that information can transcend into knowledge only "when people apply intellect to it." Information is thus useless without a proper handling. But as Dr. Jones points out, there are two different realms of knowing. One is an explicit knowledge, "the knowledge that we know we know," and another is tacit knowledge, "the knowledge we don't know we know," said Dr. Jones. To explain the hypothesis of tacit knowledge, Dr. Jones discussed the findings of Berkeley Professor Ikujiro Nanaka, who says that the reason why Japanese companies are successful is because they methodologically employ knowledge learned by experience. Professor Nanaka has pointed out in his highly recommended "The Knowledge-Creating Company" (1995) that U.S. managers tend to focus on procedures, manuals, and benchmarking, while the Japanese nurture an ability "to create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organization, and embody it in products, services, and systems" (p. 3).

Nanaka's study is based on an observation of Japanese companies over the course of the 80's for the purpose of finding out what makes them innovative, said Dr. Jones. To illustrate further the major discrepancy between the ways American and Japanese companies conduct business, Dr Jones pointed out the "East-West conflict" created in the early 20th century by the influence of Frederick Winslow Taylor, the father of scientific management. As a reminder, Taylor put a stop to what he deemed time and resource wasting in factories, stores, and homes by introducing a new way of managing and training new hires. No longer did new employees go through the long process of apprenticeship after which they had the authority of using their knowledge the way they felt was best: an established and timed procedure decided what it took to do the job, and the employee was to do it or be released – the company's profit was the determining factor. Although Taylor's stop watch practice was the woe of many workers, the principles of scientific management took root in the U.S. economy. Dr. Jones noted that Ford's Model T was the best example of this mechanized, industrialized approach to labor division, where each worker does his or her part.

It is only logical to conclude, then, that this method of management by definition and practice bars innovation from sprouting among the "field hands" that know how the job is done and possess the tacit knowledge. Dr. Jones believes tacit knowledge to be a "tremendous asset of companies" because it represents "a lot of collective memory." He stated that knowledge management would be a way of tapping into the collective memory and the honed skill carried by experienced workers. But as STC member Karen Bachmann noted and Dr. Jones agreed, implementing tacit knowledge management requires the right company culture. Dr. Jones emphasized that knowledge management must not be a privilege of only one individual or CIO. Instead, as knowledge management theorists purport, an environment must be created in which members would be encouraged to contribute their ideas and be justly rewarded for their contributions.

(Knowledge continued on page 9)

(Knowledge continued from page 8)

In terms of ways knowledge management can be made explicit, Dr. Jones stressed the importance of employing metaphors and analogy. For further exploration, he offered several titles that can be found on Amazon.com just by typing search words “knowledge management.” He said that there are over 850 books, journals, and magazines on the topic, and that the Knowledge Management Resource Center (<http://www.kmresource.com>) offers a wealth of additional information.

Dr. Jones, an STC Fellow, is a Professor of English at the University of Central Florida and the author of several books on the topic of technical communication, one of which, “The Technical Communicator’s Handbook,” will be used for the Technical Writing class in the Fall Semester at the University of South Florida. The focus of his research is on professional development as a life long process. He can be reached with questions or comments by e-mail at djones@ucf.edu. ❖

Educational News

STC offers a number of ways for technical communicators to further their education and expand their skill sets. In addition to the STC annual conference and various regional conferences, the Society offers two types of seminars conducted over the telephone.

Telephone Seminar

A telephone seminar is much like a large conference call in which the speaker makes a presentation over the phone. As a participant, you simply dial the toll-free 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 that follows.

Web-Telephone Seminar

STC is expanding its telephone seminar series to include presentations with Web-based features. In a Web and telephone seminar, participants listen to the presenter over the phone (much like a conference call) while viewing presentation materials over the Web. This format provides easier access to materials for reference during the presentation, as well as a more intimate, “classroom” setting than the typical telephone seminar.

Registrants will be provided with an 800 number, a secure URL, and passwords to access both the audio and online elements of the presentation. You then sit back, listen and view the presentations, and join in the lively Q&A discussion that follows.

For more information on upcoming seminars go to <http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>. ❖

Did You Know ...



... that the word epistemology is the study or theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity. (See the August Chapter Meeting Review on page 8.)

... that there are 21 STC Special Interests Groups (SIGs) with 8,717 members participating in at least one SIG and 6,015 members participating in more than one SIG.

... that the largest SIG is Online Information with 2,305 members and the smallest SIG is Accessibility with 231 members.

... that this summer the Society revised its mission statement. The new mission statement is located on the top of page 3.



... that the term spam as it refers to unwanted e-mail comes from a Monty Python television skit where everything ordered in a restaurant was served with Spam, the Hormel product, no matter what was ordered. So spam became known as lots of something that you really never wanted. ❖



Suncoast Chapter News

Congratulations to Linda Lyon! Her "User Interface Consistency Recommendations" article from the March/April 2003 issue of the *WriteUp* is being reprinted in the newsletter of the East Tennessee chapter.

FTCC is underway. As of this writing, the extended deadline, October 1, is still several days away and 17 entries have been received. The judges are being trained and the entries assigned. Barbara Diorio, FTCC Manager, said judging should be finished mid-November. In early December, the entrants will be notified of their results and Distinguished entries will be mailed to the International competition. Awards should be sent out in January, 2004. Good Luck to all who entered.

The Suncoast chapter financial report has been audited and filed with the Society office. The summary for the year July 1, 2002, to June 30, 2003, is located on page 7. ❖

Next Meeting:

November 6, 2003..... Networking Tips and Job Searching by Marc Granet, president, IDC Executive Search

Upcoming Meetings:

December 4, 2003 ROI/CEO Speak by Ginny Redish

January 8, 2004 Avoiding 10 Common Indexing Mistakes by Jean Gabriel

February 5, 2004 RoboHelp

March 4, 2004 Single Sourcing

April 1, 2004 Your STC Membership by Beth Tanner

May 6, 2004 TBA

June 3, 2004 Translation

Note: Meetings are subject to change. Obtain meeting updates at our Web site: <http://www.stc-southeast.org/suncoast/>

Location:

Holiday Inn Express, 3025 N. Rocky Point Drive, Tampa, 813-287-8585

Time:

6:30 p.m. Network and light dinner

7:00—9:00 p.m. Meeting

Cost:

\$10 for members and guests

\$5 for students

Administrative Council Meetings

You can be a part of our chapter at work by attending the Administrative Council meetings, which are held via teleconference at 8:15 p.m. on the Tuesday preceding the regular chapter meetings. Phone (toll free) 1-888-650-9063, Room 6301. ❖