

Ragged Left



Volume 18, Number 4
July/August 2005

In this issue

- June Meeting Wrap-up 1
- Contact Information 2
- Letter from the Editor 3
- Book Review 3
- Guest Column 5
- Chapter News 5
- President's Column 6
- Upcoming Meetings 6
- Other Organizations 7

June Meeting Wrap-up

Panel: Working as a Writer in the Medical and Scientific Fields

by Gina Blednyh

Between the information that our speakers offered and the questions that audience members asked, Berkeley's packed June meeting moved very rapidly. Linda Urban moderated a panel of speakers that included Martha Silverspring, Susan Becker, Wren Withers, Mark Evans, and Sharon Tellyer. These folks, who come from a varied collection of backgrounds, offered diverse perspectives on working in the medical and science writing fields.

All in a Day's Work

After listening to several audience questions to guide the panelists, Linda Urban began the discussion by asking perhaps the most essential one—"What's fun or interesting about the field?" Wren mentioned that she enjoys the intellectual rigor which scientific writing requires of her and that precision proves to be more crucial when writing about the sciences than software. Our panelist with a veterinary background, Sharon, agreed. She also mentioned the need for analytical thinking—that people in the sciences expect writers to figure the science out rather than have to explain the processes and terms to them. Interjecting on another topic, Mark piped in that scientists can tell when non-scientists write about a scientific piece. However Susan mentioned that she enjoys working for a non-profit research center, and although she does not hold a scientific degree she effectively works with researchers every day.

As the discussion bloomed, Mark made a point about the need to feel comfortable in a lab setting which led to Linda's next question—"Do the writers work with sensitive or expensive equipment?" It depends on the company and type of writing, although essentially seemed to be a non-issue. Another audience member wanted know what management in the field was like. One panelist mentioned that as a manager he spends approximately 50% of his time writing; on the other hand Wren does not normally spend time writing in her role as manager. Managers or not, though, the panelists spend their days in hectic environments.

Clinical Trial Writing, Manuscripts, and the FDA

Regulation, as you can probably guess, has a significant impact on scientific writing due to the fact that the FDA must review and approve of certain processes; the need for this approval drives much of some types of scientific writing. Sharon mentioned that her solid science background helps her effectively write FDA-regulated clinical trial documentation since she already possess a solid understanding of basic scientific principles. Not all medical or scientific writers work in regulated fields, however, so processes vary.

So cut to the chase: Do technical writers really need a medical or science background to work as writers in these fields?

What many people who came to the June 8th meeting indicated that they wanted to know about was whether or not a person without medical or scientific education can hope to enter the field and effectively work in it. Answers varied, although leaned toward the need for some formal (i.e. college education) in the sciences. Mark

Continued on page 3

STC Headquarters

901 N. Stuart Street #904
Arlington VA 22203-1854
(703) 522-4114

stc@stc.org
fax 703-522-2075

Executive Director: Peter Herbst
pete@stc.org

Membership: MaryRose Velasquez
maryrose@stc.org

STC President

Suzanna Laurent
pres@stc.org

STC Region 8 Director

Beau Cain
ds8@stc.org

Chapter Officers and Volunteers

President: Joe Devney
510-534-0614
president@stc-berkeley.org

VP Programs: Open
programs@stc-berkeley.org

VP Membership: Jim Dexter
membership@stc-berkeley.org

Secretary: Eunice Malley
secretary@stc-berkeley.org

Treasurer: Ben Lukas
treasurer@stc.berkeley.org

Employment: Caroline Scharf
employment@stc-berkeley.org

Public Relations: Jessica Livingston
publicrelations@stc-berkeley.org

Volunteers: Joe Devney
volunteers@stc-berkeley.org

Ragged Left Staff

Managing editor: Gina Blednyh
newsletter@stc-berkeley.org

Contributing editors: Joe Devney Richard
Mateosian

Other contacts

STC on the Internet: www.stc.org

Chapter Job List: employment@stc-berkeley.org

Address, phone, or e-mail changes:
VP for Membership
membership@stc-berkeley.org

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (STC) has members worldwide. Its members include writers and editors, artists and illustrators, photographers and audiovisual specialists, managers and supervisors, educators and students, employees and consultants.

STC strives to

- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication
- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to everyone. Classic membership is \$145/year with an additional \$15 enrollment fee. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or e-mail

- Send e-mail to membership@stc-berkeley.org
- Send mail to Berkeley STC, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007

INSURANCE

Members of STC can apply for health, disability, and other insurance at STC group rates. For more information, contact STC office at stc@stc.org or (703) 522-4114.

WORLDWIDE ACTIVITIES

STC's annual conference brings together more than 2,000 technical communicators from around the world for educational programs, seminars, and workshops conducted by experts in the field. Upcoming annual conferences: Seattle, May 8-11, 2005; Las Vegas, May 14-17, 2006. In addition the STC sponsors many regional conferences, which feature the same sorts of programs, seminars, and workshops on a more intimate scale.

STC sponsors international and regional competitions in all aspects of technical communication.

STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) bring together members with common experiences and interests to share their skills and knowledge. STC SIGs include:

- AccessAbility
- Canadian Issues
- Education and Research
- Illustrators and Visual Designers
- Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication
- Consulting and Independent Contracting
- Quality
- Marketing Communication
- Scientific Communication

STC sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the quarterly journal *Technical Communication*, the newsletter *Intercom*, and other periodicals, reference materials, manuals, anthologies, standards, and booklets.

Formed in 1953, STC has today become the largest professional society in the world dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of technical communication.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

The six northern California chapters of STC conduct a variety of individual and joint activities. See page 6 for contacts for these chapters. See page 7 for a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

This newsletter is free to members of the Berkeley chapter.

ADVERTISING RATES

The *Ragged Left* is not accepting advertising at this time.

SUBMISSIONS

Ragged Left publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please talk with the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

The deadline for unsolicited submissions is the fifteenth of the preceding month.

Other STC publications are hereby granted permission to reprint articles from *Ragged Left*, provided such reprints credit the author and the specific *Ragged Left* issue, and a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.



June Meeting Wrap-up continued

seemed to hold this belief vehemently, in fact. On the other end of the spectrum, though, Susan shared her positive experience working as a technical writer without formal training in the sciences; she currently works for Stanford Linear Accelerator in a highly science-centric environment and began working in the field by performing editing work.

Other Useful Attributes of Good Science Writers

What about curiosity—a trait strongly affiliated with a good technical writer? One panelist thought that curiosity and passion are important while Susan believed that writers should build on their interests. Wren mentioned the importance of attention to detail. All in all, traits that you probably already possess.

Educational Resources

By the time I left the meeting a few minutes early to catch a train, it seemed that the group could continue speaking for another several hours and still not answer all of the audience members' questions. Fortunately, they offered the below resources for interested people to obtain further information:

UC Berkeley Extension

(<http://www.unex.berkeley.edu/>)

UC Santa Cruz Extension

(<http://www.ucsc-extension.edu/ucsc/>)

The American Medical Writers Association

(<http://www.amwa.org/>)

Drug Information Association

(<http://www.diahome.org/docs/index.cfm>)

Gina Blednyh works as a technical writer and is an active Berkeley Chapter Member.

Letter from the Editor

Things Change Yet Stay the Same

by Gina Blednyh

If you could not attend our June meeting, we had a great panel of experienced medical and science writers talk about working in these fields. Unfortunately I had to write the piece. While I enjoy writing, it would be great to get more voices heard and a more diverse perspective represented in the newsletter. As I looked at previous issues of the *Ragged Left* to glean some wisdom from past editors, I saw that a lack of written contributions is

not a new problem. We always need more content and would be grateful for your offering; please send me an e-mail at newsletter@stc-berkeley.org with your article ideas.

Ragged Left editor Gina Blednyh can be reached at newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

Book Review

Friedman's Flat World (Part I) by Richard Mateosian

The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century by Thomas L. Friedman (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York NY, 2005, 496pp, ISBN 0-374-29288-4, www.fsgbooks.com, \$27.50)

Tom Friedman addressed globalization with his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (FSG, 1999). In that book he noted that half the world was trying to make excellent products that they could sell worldwide, while the other half was fighting over who owns which olive tree. After the terrible attacks of September 11, 2001, however, Friedman focused almost entirely on the Middle East (the olive tree side of that book) until early in 2004, when he looked around and noticed that a great deal had happened on the Lexus side. He set about to understand and explain the new developments, and this book is the result.

Friedman's title represents his discovery that the "playing field" is much larger and more level than he had realized. That playing field does not, however, encompass the whole world. Friedman acknowledges this late in the book and admits that his rosy picture of globalization has a dark side. He has suggestions for addressing the dark side, but they depend on understanding his flat world.

Triple Convergence

Friedman equates the flat world with a rising spiral of horizontal collaboration. This comes from a convergence of the following factors:

- Synergistic interaction of what Friedman calls the ten flatteners.
- Widespread adjustment of business practices to accommodate the flatteners.
- Three billion new players on the field.

Flatteners

Friedman's flatteners are a little arbitrary, but I think they cover the ground pretty well. They are the following, roughly in chronological order.

1. Walls Down, Windows Open



Book Review continued

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 marked a big step toward worldwide unity. One of the world's two main economic systems had collapsed, leaving just one viable model. This was tremendously liberating for both India and China, as well as the 600,000 inhabitants of the Soviet Union. By an odd coincidence, roughly the same date marked the emergence of Windows 3.0 -- not a very good operating system by today's standards, but good enough to become the worldwide standard.

2. Everyone Can Browse

The Netscape initial public offering on August 9, 1995, is the signpost for Friedman's second flattener. The browser made huge numbers of public sites available to anyone with a modem and a PC, practically anywhere in the world. Just as important, the Netscape offering kicked off the dotcom bubble, resulting in vast amounts of fiberoptic cable providing high speed communication between the United States and much of the rest of the world, including India. When the bubble burst, companies were able to use this cable for very little money.

3. Applications Can Collaborate

The third flattener is the development of what Friedman calls workflow software. By this he means the XML-based protocols that allow software packages to communicate. The loose coupling that this architecture provides has allowed many ad hoc collaborations between software packages that were never designed to collaborate.

4. Open Source

The fourth flattener is the open source movement. Friedman tells the story of Apache, which has enabled companies to use a worldwide free standard as the basis for their application servers, then add (and charge for) their own bells and whistles. He distinguishes this from the Gnu/Linux model in which it is much harder for companies to charge for their add-ons. Both of these models make world class software available free to anyone in the world, and they also serve to keep the prices of competing commercial products low.

The next four flatteners describe business practices that exemplify horizontal collaboration.

5. Outsourcing

6. Offshoring

Outsourcing and offshoring are practices that many people confuse. Outsourcing describes the identification of discrete business modules that can be done

elsewhere and the delegation of those modules to other companies. Offshoring entails moving an entire operation to another country, but keeping control of it.

Outsourcing to Indian firms, according to Friedman got a big head start during the Y2K scare. Many United States companies outsourced their Y2K repairs to Indian firms because they simply couldn't find enough workers and enough money to do the work in the US. This built the reputations of many Indian firms for high quality work at low cost. Then, when the dotcom bubble burst and US firms had a lot less cash, they turned to India out of need, but with confidence, for many of their software development needs. And the abundance of fiberoptic cable made the collaboration much easier than it would have been otherwise.

Friedman's discussion of offshoring focuses on China. That country, with its authoritarian structure, was able to impose a change in its economic system from the top down. All it took was for Deng Xiaoping to say "Black cat, white cat, all that matters is that it catches mice. To get rich is glorious." As we all know, however, top down changes don't always percolate smoothly to the bottom. Many firms got burned before they learned the best strategies for offshoring to China, but many US firms now have highly successful and profitable operations in China.

7. Supply Chaining

The seventh flattener is supply chaining. Friedman describes the far-flung Dell supply chain that produced the notebook computer on which he wrote the book. He also describes the intimate relationship between Wal-Mart and its suppliers. Not only does Wal-Mart integrate its suppliers' workflows into its own, but it feeds information about sales back to its suppliers to help them improve their offerings. Of course, this relationship gives Wal-Mart extraordinary leverage over its suppliers, and Wal-Mart uses this leverage to full advantage.

8. Insourcing

Friedman calls the eighth flattener insourcing. You could call it outsourcing as seen from the vendor's point of view, but it is qualitatively different. If you call Toshiba to report a problem with your laptop, they tell you to take it to UPS. UPS, however, does not deliver the laptop to Toshiba. Instead, UPS repairs the laptop at its own hub and delivers it back

Document Design

by Ilango Gurusamy



A profoundly inspirational moment is the indispensable catalyst that stokes the fires of an author's thought processes on the way to coming up with a brainchild—a real written work that's all set to exist for specific reason. It is this abstraction that the writer will want to endeavor to give shape to and to transform into a tangible entity. The practical guidelines discussed below should help writers with this transformation process and can apply to the design of any kind of written document. Writers will also want to draw on their own personal journeys and policies to achieve the goals emphasized by these guidelines.

Cater to readers' wants and anticipations

The proper and judicious integration of text and graphics is just one aspect of the document design process. Lamination and binding in brochures and pamphlets and navigational aids on a web document are all elements that can be used in accord with the type of audience and their wants and anticipations. Introducing something which the audience does not expect to see results in a state called cognitive dissonance—a state in which the writer is seen to believe in two contradictory things at the same time. This state is unusual and should be avoided as far as possible if the reader is not to be misled or confused. For example, if a freelancer were asked to prepare a Physics Lab Manual, the writer does not have to compose a literary work on the philosophy and scientific spirit for each experiment. A concise and to-the-point explanatory style with a supplemental approach to the text book would be the way to go.

Take resources into consideration

Resource usage is another factor that needs to be considered seriously in document design. A few years ago I worked at the Indian Institute of Science in India. Due to inadequate funding or bureaucratic problems our lab lacked modern computers and office software. This constrained us to use an ancient computer for our project documents that the client regularly required. The antiquated software that came with this computer was cumbersome to

use and contained few features, resulting in extra time and money spent. Ultimately we had to make do with barely acceptable LOOKING? documents which could have been better.

Use a relevant design structure

The use of a relevant design structure is dependent on one of two categories that I broadly identify. There are many others, but for simplicity, I will discuss web-based writing and purely text-based writing. The use of rigid and correct forms of grammatical structures is a style of expression found in print-based writing. This style is based more on text than on graphics and other visual aids that are normally a fixture in web-based writing and less formal forms of writing—for example a presentation or a memo. A person writing a PhD thesis on the Renaissance period would do well to adopt a strongly literary approach with an emphasis on correct grammatical usage and proper sentence structure. However the same writer can be asked to prepare a short summary of the Renaissance in less than 600 words for a literary website. The design of the web document would rely less on a rigid linear hierarchical form of organization of topics, for the emphasis would be more on links that grant the reader freedom to navigate to topics based on level of attention, time or interest. If the intended audience is a non-literary group, then the writing style should preferably use more graphics and other visual aids to convey the message of the article in a simpler and broader manner. Lastly, whether the writer uses print-based writing or web-based writing, the design for the document should be able to bridge contexts that can make the writer's message more accessible. For instance, in the Renaissance web page, the writer could draw upon real world experiences with music and the influence of music on life to convey the need for thinkers to bring about positive changes in the lives of human beings through a greater understanding and patronization of arts, science, etc.

Ilango Gurusamy is a production technician pursuing a masters degree in computer science.

Chapter News

Chapter Election Results by Richard Mateosian

At our chapter meeting on June 8, 2005 we

Continued on page 7



Book Review continued

to you. This is just one of many examples of how UPS encourages its package delivery customers to outsource functions that happen just before or after package delivery to UPS.

UPS and similar firms have logistics as a core competency, and they engage in intimate collaborations with other firms to insource the logistical aspects of those firms' businesses.

9. Informing

Other STC chapters in Northern California

East Bay

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

North Bay

www.stc-northbay.org

Sacramento

www.stcsacramento.org

San Francisco

www.stc-sf.org

Silicon Valley

www.stc-siliconvalley.org/

Upcoming STC Berkeley Meetings

Stalking the Wild SME Bird

Speakers: Susan Becker, Melody Brumis, and Gwaltney Mountford

July 13, 2005

August Meeting Topic: A New Level of Edit: Usability Evaluation by Channelling Personas

Speaker: Dana E. Chisnell

August 10, 2005

SEE THE CHAPTER WEB SITE FOR MORE DETAILS: WWW.STC-BERKELEY.ORG

The ninth flattener is Google and related services. Anybody can find out practically anything from anywhere at any time. This automates and expands the vanilla aspects of what assistants or librarians used to do. As Friedman points out, when Colin Powell wanted to look at UN Resolution 242, he didn't need to call an aide. He just Googled it. Powell's aides had to find other ways to add value.

The availability of powerful search capabilities has many implications for ordinary citizens. A great deal of personal history and information is readily available to potential employers, lenders, or even acquaintances. And your mistakes will follow you forever.

10. Steroids

Friedman rounds off his ten flatteners with one he calls the steroids. By this he means that each new generation of computers provides greater MIPS, more memory, and faster I/O. File sharing, multi-purpose devices, voice over IP, and wireless communication all work to supercharge the other flatteners.

Please see the next issue of the Ragged Left for a continuation of this review.

Richard Mateosian is a senior Berkeley chapter member. A version of this review appeared in the May-June 2005 issue of IEEE Micro. Copyright © 2005 IEEE.

President's Column

Inside and Outside the Chapter

by Joe Devney

STC NorCal

The Northern California area is unusual, perhaps unique, in STC because there are six chapters in fairly close geographic proximity here: Silicon Valley, Berkeley, East Bay, North Bay, San Francisco, and Sacramento. Under the unofficial name of "STC Norcal," these chapters cooperated to hold a series of three Leadership Days for people involved in the chapters.

The final Leadership Day was held earlier this year, and the attendees agreed that it was a great success. One question that came out of the event was "What happens to STC NorCal now?"

The Berkeley chapter was well-represented. The

Continued on page 7

Chapter News continued

concluded our annual chapter election. Our 2004-05 board members (Joe Devney, Jim Dexter, Valerie Steele, Eunice Malley, and Ben Lukas) finished their terms on June 30th. Many thanks to them for their service. Our new board's terms begins July 1, 2005. The 2005-06 chapter officers are:

- President: Joe Devney
- Vice-president for membership: Jim Dexter
- Vice-president for programs: <open>
- Secretary: Eunice Malley
- Treasurer: <open>

As you can see, two important positions remain open. Please contact Joe Devney (president@stc-berkeley.org) if you are interested in volunteering for either of these positions. Ben Lukas, our outgoing treasurer, has agreed to continue to take care of our finances until the chapter board can find a replacement for him. Valerie Steele, our outgoing vice-president for programs, with the generous help of chapter member Linda Urban, has planned programs through October. If you volunteer for that job, you'll have a little cushion to help you get started. Many thanks to our new board and to all of you who voted. And thanks in advance to those of you who will step forward this year, and in the years to come, to help our chapter set and achieve its goals.

Richard Mateosian is a senior Berkeley chapter member.

President's Column Continued

continue, and perhaps we should find a way to give the organization some kind of official status within STC. Jim Dexter presented some options, and Dana Chisnell of STC provided the Society's perspective on creating an STC NorCal community in STC's new organizational structure.

The group agreed on a set of goals, and drafted a statement of purpose. We will meet again in August to continue the discussion. If any Ber-

keley chapter members would like to learn more about what is going on with STC NorCal, please contact me.

AMWA

One of my goals as chapter president is to connect STC Berkeley with other Bay Area writers' organizations. One of these is the Northern California chapter of the American Medical Writers' Association. AMWA NC chapter president Naomi Ruff attended the June STC Berkeley meeting, and brought a couple of announcements.

For fun-seekers, AMWA Ncal is having a picnic in Tilden Park on July 16, and Berkeley STC members are invited. See their website for details, www.amwancal.org.

For those thinking about career issues, the Northern California and the Pacific Southwest chapters of AMWA are co-hosting their Pacific Coast Conference in Berkeley next spring. Berkeley STC members with an interest in medical writing may want to attend—some of you may even have knowledge to share with the crowd, and might consider being a presenter. Watch the AMWA Ncal website for information as the date draws nearer.

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month at the Shattuck Plaza Hotel, 2086 Allston Way, just west of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley. The Hotel is across the street from the BART station at Allston and Shattuck. The cost for dinner and meeting is \$18 for members, \$15 for student members and \$21 for non-members. For those attending the meeting only, the cost is \$12 for members and non-members, \$10 for students.

-
- | | |
|------|---|
| 6:00 | Check-in, conversation. |
| 6:30 | Dinner. |
| 7:15 | Chapter business and announcements. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.* |
| 7:39 | Formal program. Usually we have a speaker or panel of speakers on a topic related to the business or technology of technical communication. |
| 9:00 | Conversation, offline questions for the speaker, follow-up on job announcements |
| 9:30 | Clear the room. Move conversations to the sidewalk. |

*Recruiters are welcome to attend meetings, place literature on a designated table, and talk with attendees one-on-one during the informal parts of the meeting. We ask them not to announce specific jobs during the formal announcement period, but they are free to stand up and identify themselves.

Similarly, we ask anyone else with commercial announcements to confine themselves to calling attention to the availability of literature on the designated table.

Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. <http://www.amwancal.org>

American Society for Training and Development, Mount Diablo Chapter. Meets monthly in Danville. <http://mtdiablostd.org/>.

American Society of Indexers, Golden Gate Chapter. <http://www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden>

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter <http://www.awc-sf.org/>

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. A network of professionals committed to improving the effectiveness of organizations through strategic interactive and integrated business communication management <http://sf.iabc.com/>

National Writers Union (UAW). A labor union for freelance writers of all genres. <http://www.nwu.org>

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings and other events. <http://www.ncswa.org>

First class mail
Please return to sender if not deliverable as addressed

Networking 6:00 Dinner 6:30 Program 7:15

Agenda

Allston Way at Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley

Shattuck Plaza Hotel

Location

Wednesday, July 13, 2005

Bird

Stalking the Wild SME

July Meeting

Berkeley Chapter
The Society for Technical Communication
P.O. Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701

Ragged Left

By BART:

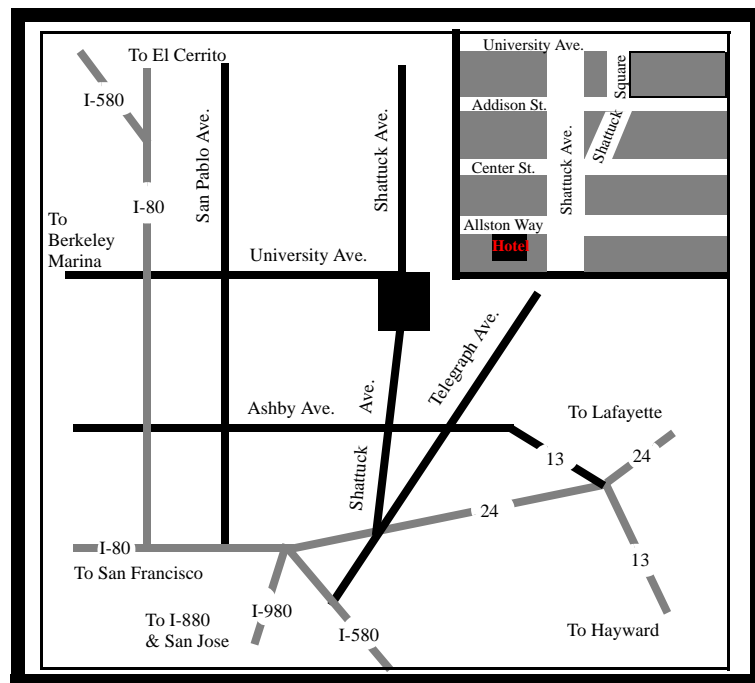
Get off at the downtown Berkeley station (Richmond line) and walk south to Allston Way, the first street. Cross the street and turn right.

By Car:

From north of Berkeley on I-80, take the University Avenue exit (east). Turn right on Shattuck Avenue. Allston Way is three blocks south.

From south of Berkeley, take 880 north from San Jose. Continue through Oakland on 880. Follow the highway as it curves sharply to the right (where traffic merges in) and becomes 980. Continue on 980 to Highway 24 (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Take the first exit from 24 (Martin Luther King Jr./51st). Turn right on 51st and make an immediate left onto Shattuck. Proceed north on Shattuck 2.3 miles to downtown Berkeley. Allston Way is immediately before the BART station.

Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions



Walking to your car or BART?

We can't guarantee you an escort, but we'll try.