**TC3 Gives Something “Usable” to Metro State**

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On March 14, Metropolitan State’s TC3 (Twin Cities, Technical Communication, Technical Community) student organization hosted a university event. In a Student Center classroom, faculty, students and alumni gathered to learn about an emerging career field—user experience. Many students heard about the exciting employment possibilities, but they did not know what this specialty entailed. To help people learn more about technical communication and related work activities, TC3 brought in special guests to share their experiences. On this night TC3 introduced the president of the Society for Technical Communication (Twin Cities Chapter), Barbara Beresford.

Besides serving an organizational leadership role, Beresford works on a group project to revamp the website for her chapter. According to her LinkedIn page, she also works as a senior technical writer for MorphoTrust USA. Beresford’s company invents security solutions to keep citizens safe. These innovative technologies include digital IDs, facial recognition software, iris scanners, fingerprint identification systems and driver’s license issuance devices. She creates software instructions for high-tech biometric security products.

Beresford is also a speaker for The Society of Technical Communication (www.stc.org). The STC is a professional association for technical communication practitioners and students. Their members have access to educational conferences, weekly webinars, online courses, newsletters and networking prospects to help them advance their careers. In 2014, Beresford spoke to members at a Society for Technical Communication Summit. At last month’s TC3 event, she presented her “*Minimalism—It’s Really About the User!”* You can view slides from Beresford’s presentation at www.slideshare.net/BarbaraBeresford/minimalism-its-really-about-the-user-34924489.

During her speech, Beresford gave the audience information on how she became a technical writer. Surprisingly, her early education includes a master’s degree and Ph.D. coursework in theater. Eventually, she became involved with writing and editing work. As a writer, Beresford became interested in taking independent study courses and reading industry journals. From her experience with the STC, she became enthusiastic about minimalism.

As Beresford’s self-education journey continued, she became inspired by well-known usability authors. One of these was psychologist John Carroll, who studied users as they used instructions to complete a task. Instead of using the instructions in a sequential manner, the readers wanted to use the information without having to do too much reading. As a result, the users frequently made mistakes and had difficulty completing the tasks. From her experience, Beresford also noticed a need for better user instructions—that is, something more usable. She contemplated how she could use what she learned to create better user experiences.

As a technical writer, Beresford strives to create instructions and tutorials using the minimalist design. She notes that minimalism is not simply removing excess instructions. Instead, it involves creating content that motivates users and helps them become more motivated to learn faster and remember what they learned. Influenced by her days as an actor where she tried “walking in the shoes of the character,” Beresford visualizes the motivations and needs of her users. She knows the importance of observing the users as they use instructions and software to help her determine what adjustments to make.