SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Supplementary Materials – Panel

STC's 52nd Annual Conference
May 8-11, 2005 ▪ Seattle, WA

Due to the volume of proposals received, the Program Committee relies on peer reviews to determine which sessions will ensure the best conference for attendees. Conference proposals are evaluated by reviewers with both domain and conference experience. Please provide as much detail as possible so that your proposal can be evaluated accurately.

Panel Title: Issues within the STC Academic Community: Part 1, Education

Submitted By: Thomas Barker, Texas Tech University Phone: 806 742-2500 ext. 279

Topic:

Please describe the topic of your panel. Consider its relevance to the STC audience and describe the information that will be provided. Describe what attendees will learn and why this is an important topic.

This panel is one of two being proposed to address the needs of the newly chartered STC Academic Community. The corresponding panel is entitled: "Issues within the STC Academic Community: Part 2, Research"

These two panels bring together the required 15 persons needed to charter a community under the rubric of the transformation of STC. The panels consist of well known names in the existing academic community, who have responded to the session plan.

The topic of this panel is issues faced by a newly chartered STC Academic Community. The topic is relevant to persons interested in the contribution that this community makes to the profession. Attendees will learn about value provided by academic members, definitions of what academics in technical communication do, how academics can become visible within the STC, and how the academic community can grow.

The topic of **education** is relevant to persons interested in the contribution that this community makes to the profession. Attendees will learn about issues facing educators and students and how the society can support this important community. Panelists will tell about theories and strategies for providing value to students.

Session Plan:

The panel format requires a detailed session plan including main points, sample discussion questions, and schedule. You should list all panelists as co-presenters.

The panel will explore issues such as the following:

The panel will follow the format set by STC for Panel Presentations. The schedule will consist of the following:

1. Opening remarks and welcome by the Moderator (Barker)

2. Each panelist will give a five-minute summary of his or her position.
3. Discussion will follow, guided by questions such as those listed below: *(Note: These are the questions set forth for establishing a "community" under the auspices of the STC Transformation.)*

- Ways to **provide value** to academic members: support for education, funding for teacher research, surveying and providing information about programs, how can STC provide materials for teaching?
- Ways to identify the **boundaries** of the "academic community:" who qualifies as an academic, what leadership opportunities exist within the community, when is a good time of year that might promote participation among educators (other than during final exams, for example), how can training and education parallel one another productively, how can STC help teachers identify core competencies in technical communication?
- Ways to provide a "**visible presence**" as a way of serving members: how can we promote student publication in *TC*, how can we support student chapters, how can STC support student participation in national and regional conferences?
- Ways to **grow and strengthen** the academic community within STC: how can STC further encourage interaction between students and professionals, what steps should we take to develop a mentoring or internship program, should STC provide program review?

4. Each panelist will give a brief summary statement.

Co-presenters:

Education: Setting the Boundaries of the Academic Community
Dr. Russel Hirst
Dept. of English
University of Tennessee

Education: How Can STC Bridge Industry and Institutes
Mak Pandit
Makarand Pandit
Technowrites Pvt. Ltd

Education: Reflections on How STC Provides Social, Educational, and Service Opportunities for Technical Communication Academics Serving as Lone Rangers
Heather Sehmel McGovern
The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

Education: Building an Academic Network through STC
Sandy Balkema
Technical and Professional Communication Program
Ferris State University

Education: Services Academics Offer: Considering Ways Organizations Can Seek Help from Universities
Charlsye Smith Diaz
Professional and Technical Writing Program
University of Hartford

Education: Issues within the STC Academic Community
Elizabeth (Betsy) O. Smith
Auburn University

Education: How the STC Academic Community Can Meet Academics' Needs

Marjorie T. Davis, Ph.D.; Professor & Chair
Technical Communication Department
School of Engineering, Mercer University

Education: Integrating Disciplines for New Directions in Technical Communication: The Case of Research Literature and Methods

Robert Krull
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Sample Materials:

Please provide either sample materials (visuals, handouts, reference/resource list) or describe the handouts you will be providing.

As this is a panel, I do not anticipate any handouts other than copies of the abstracts (see below) provided by each of the panelists.

Other Relevant Information:

Please provide any additional information that you feel is relevant to your proposal. This might include other speaking experience, previously published works, or past experience.

I have been asked to help establish an academic community under the rubric of the transformation of STC into a society sensitive to the needs of various communities beyond the professional and geographical ones now represented by the society. To that end, I see this panel as a focus point for academics who want to shape the future of this community.

I, and the presenters, have substantial speaking experience at STC and plan to provide a balanced and comprehensive view of the issues that academic members face. I, and the presenters, have contributed to past STC conferences and the Society by publishing in *Technical communication*, *intercom*, and research-based books and articles that form the intellectual basis of the Society.

Session Keywords:

Please provide a list of suitable keywords for indexing your session.

academic, profession, education, research, funding, publication, promotion, respect

Abstracts

Education: Setting the Boundaries of the Academic Community

Dr. Russel Hirst
Dept. of English
University of Tennessee

The topics I'd address are related to "ways to identify the boundaries of the academic community" and "who qualifies as an academic." I'd like to approach these questions by way of discussing the problem of defining and categorizing tech comm programs. I've been engaged in this discussion, one way or another, ever since the early 90s, when I was one of the editors and contributors to Education in Technical Communication: Academic Programs That Work (STC Press, 1997. But the research was done much earlier). You may have seen this book—now out of print, unhelpfully enough. Mike was general editor. In fact, Mike and I have been saying to each other that it's past time for the second edition of that book. Perhaps the meeting in Seattle can function in multiple ways, including as sounding board for interest in producing the second edition of this book. The original authors should be invited to contribute again, of course.

So, my opening question(s) would be something like "What's the current shape of academic programs in scientific and technical communication in the United States?—and if we don't know the answer in detail, and with confidence, how can we find out?" I would then proceed to describe some

of the thinking that went into Education in Technical Communication: Academic Programs That Work , and I'd speculate about the kinds of things we now have to consider in order to define and describe the structure of the realm of Tech Comm Academia, given the changes in our field over the last decade. My closing statement would be something along the lines of "our profession would benefit significantly from a reconsidered and re-focused view of the entire sweep of academic programs in scientific and technical communication. Let's again put together a team of academics to seek a collaborative research grant from STC and to launch into research and writing of Education in Technical Communication: Academic Programs That Work , 2nd edition.

Education: How Can STC Bridge Industry and Institutes

Mak Pandit
Makarand Pandit
Technowrites Pvt. Ltd

Opening Statement

Learning is one of the only processes that span the lifetime of a human being. As an individual progresses through life, situations change. Training can help cope with these changes and master them.

The industry should collaborate with the institutes and develop courses that are better aligned to today's job requirements. On-the-job training has its advantages and disadvantages. The institutes can devise courses that can gain from the advantages and reduce the disadvantages.

Academicians should come out with courses that address needs of new entrant as well as seasoned professionals

The learning curve of an individual in Technical Writing career and the training requirements at various important points (this will be a graphical illustration).

Role of STC

STC has chapters for professionals and students. The Academic council can server as a platform for the academicians to come together. Cross-pollination of their thoughts can breed new ideas.

STC can:

- propose course structure or course guidelines
- offer certification programs
- collate and publish data about courses and students
- suggest its chapters in countries like India and Singapore, to act as catalysts for developing training courses · allocate budget for Academic Council's activities
- recommend new courses or updates to existing courses

Some experiments

- Industry can provide opportunities to the academicians to participate in live projects.
- Industry could get students of the subject involved in live projects.
- There could be special events/competitions for students.
- The academicians can invite professionals to interact with the students and conduct training courses. That will help them realize the limitations and opportunities.

Closing Statement

Neither the industry nor the institutes can succeed in isolation. They need to come together to exist and to excel. STC's Academic Community could be the bridge between them. We should look at creating better training processes and better trained professionals.

Education: Reflections on How STC Provides Social, Educational, and Service Opportunities for Technical Communication Academics Serving as Lone Rangers

Heather Sehmel McGovern
The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

(Intro) Let me share the best and worst of my recent STC experiences, which probably mirror many recently hired academics'—then let me offer suggestions for improving them.
(Overview of benefits): After leaving a graduate program with a healthy student STC chapter (in which I served as an officer) for employment at a small college where I am the only technical communication professor and there is no student STC chapter, I've found my local STC informative and supportive. Meetings keep me abreast of current practice, so I can provide students with timely information. Meetings and service opportunities with my local chapter also provide social contact and so prevent professional isolation.

(Overview of problems): There are problems, however: my local chapter is based an hour from my college, and many meetings are further away, often late for me if I have an 8 am class. Many meeting topics are far from my or my students' interests, and most of the email I receive is for fascinating but prohibitively expensive (for individual participation) telephone seminars. Finally, I rarely find other academics at meetings.

(Partial list of suggestions): My local chapter has made its regular meetings geographically and financially easier to attend, but I think my STC chapter and others, and those, like me, who are academic participants, could do more to make STC a vital part of our professional lives.

Suggestions:

- The STC chapter could personally invite academics working at local colleges, universities, and community colleges to join—or to come to a social/informative session.
- The STC chapter could host an email listserv or other electronic discussion board for local academics
- The STC chapter could host a few meetings a year just for local academics to get to know one another and discuss issues important to them
- The STC chapter could encourage local academics to meet more frequently on their own, informally, to maintain ties and discuss important issues regarding their teaching and research
- Local academics could participate in these opportunities and more

Education: Building an Academic Network through STC

Sandy Balkema
Technical and Professional Communication Program
Ferris State University

- The STC meetings were a great way to encourage networking, and I really feel that should continue to be stressed. The one thing I've learned is that networking is the single most important thing you can do for your career.
- The best advice I can offer is to interact with professionals in the field. Each area of tech writing is so very different!
- A little more correlation to the professionals in the field. The connection to the profession seemed so distant to me as a student. The jobs available are so varied and scattered, it is difficult to decide on, or focus in a direction in which to proceed after graduation.

The Technical and Professional Communication (B.S.) degree program at Ferris State University (Big Rapids, MI) is currently in the process of Program Review. This process, necessary in our academic institution to ensure the continuation of the program for the next 6-year period, forces the faculty to evaluate our course offerings, program structure, as well as the future job market for our graduates. The Program Review process also encourages us to collect official data and comments from our graduates.

The comments above are only a small sample of the many we received emphasizing the importance of “networking” and connection to professionals for students about to enter our profession.

Over the 20 years of the TPC Program’s existence, we’ve attempted to meet this need in many ways including job shadowing assignments, required attendance at STC chapter meetings (the closest to us being over 60 miles distant), class visits and discussions with professionals, as well as a short-lived mentoring program. Each of these approaches has had its value. Organizing and supporting them has been, admittedly, the most difficult aspect of the student-to-professional connection.

Faculty, too, need this connection in order to stay current with business practices, professional tools, job and internship locations for our students, and most importantly, to keep our professional writing skills polished. A personal sabbatical leave afforded me the personal opportunity to spend a year “in the field,” while many of my professional colleagues gain this exposure as consultants or on short-term contract projects.

How do we as academics bridge the gap between the professional world and the academic one –for ourselves and for our students? And how can the STC assist us in these attempts?

Let’s talk about 3 programs/opportunities and try to highlight what each would take to be a viable STC-supported activity as well as the values and drawbacks of each as a vehicle for “connection” between the academic and professional worlds:

1. student – professional mentor program
2. academic – professional externship program
3. student STC chapters (pro / con)

Education: Services Academics Offer: Considering Ways Organizations Can Seek Help from Universities

Charlsye Smith Diaz
Professional and Technical Writing Program
University of Hartford

In technical communication, we talk about bridging academy and industry quite often, and we usually brainstorm ways that academics can forge relationships with professional organizations. This presentation focuses on the reverse: helping technical communicators seek out academics who can work on workplace writing problems. As important as it is for academics to find corporate liaisons for student internship possibilities, guest speakers, and region-specific information about the field of technical communication, organizations need to understand they can seek out academics to solve their important problems as well. Academics can offer expertise in training, problem-solving methodologies, and research facilities and can help organizations work through problems of collaboration, technology, design, and communication. In this presentation, I will discuss the need for the academy and industry to work collaboratively; describe the services academics can offer industry within the field of technical communication; and, work with participants to consider ways to approach academics with communication problems.

Education: Issues within the STC Academic Community

Elizabeth (Betsy) O. Smith
Auburn University

STC supports students through scholarships, the honor fraternities Sigma Tau Chi and Alpha Sigma, and recognition of student chapter achievements. STC members provide a network for information and contacts for employment. The academic community needs to strengthen its ties to STC by encouraging students to apply for these awards and recognitions and to take advantage of the network of professionals.

Two examples: As manager of the honor fraternities, each year I receive applications from the same schools. The students at these schools have earned the honor—but I am sure there are more schools with students who could earn the recognition (and a year's membership in STC). We need to encourage faculty from more schools to participate. As part of the panel, I will solicit from the audience ideas for how to encourage greater participation. Two ideas to explore are advertising the honors more and adjusting the criteria so that students not on a campus with a student chapter may qualify.

Academics can initiate programs on campus that will attract professionals and give students opportunities to interact with STC members. For example, Auburn University does not have enough students to sustain a student chapter; however, the faculty initiated an all day conference in the spring that brings students and professionals together. Members from the Birmingham and Atlanta chapters participate. From these annual conferences, students have found summer internships, leads to full time employment, and visits to job sites to see technical communicators in action. The participation and interaction works both ways. Students meet professionals and see the advantages of participating in a professional organization. STC gains new members eager to contribute to the network that helped them enter the profession.

Education: How the STC Academic Community Can Meet Academics' Needs

Marjorie T. Davis, Ph.D.; Professor & Chair
Technical Communication Department
School of Engineering, Mercer University

Most faculty teaching in technical communication programs belong to a number of professional organizations: CCCC, ATTW, and CPTSC are probably the most common. Fewer academics are active in STC. Several reasons are expressed: faculty peers on tenure and promotion committees may not consider the society as "academic enough"; dues in STC are higher; some technical communication faculty regard their primary disciplinary home as English; and many are unaware of the benefits of STC.

STC complements other academic communities in some unique, beneficial ways:

- Unlike other societies, STC is made up primarily of practitioners of technical communication; teachers can establish valuable industry relationships to benefit their programs and their students (industry advisory boards, internships, entry level jobs, consulting)
- Because many technical communication teachers do not have industry experience, STC conferences and publications provide depth and breadth in knowledge of practice, a necessary corollary to theory for strong TC programs
- STC provides excellent participation opportunities for students in TC courses and programs in conferences, publications, and SIGs; a new TC community for students is being formed that allows participation without geographical limitations
- *Technical Communication* is a valuable asset for teaching, since its articles include both research and practice and are more relevant for students than some other journals; faculty have permission to use articles in classes without copyright worries
- STC conferences are large and diverse with presentations in a wide range of topics (internationalization, usability, tools and technologies, writing and editing, knowledge management, etc.)

Education: Integrating Disciplines for New Directions in Technical Communication: The Case of Research Literature and Methods

Robert Krull
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

As corporate budgets have tightened and technical communicators have transitioned to writer-illustrator-trainer-web master-usability expert, universities have been asked to play new roles as well. One role is to conduct the kind of research previously done in industry; the other is to train students for their job responsibilities. The potential amount of material to be mastered by academics

is tremendous. Useful research can be found in composition, linguistics, post modern literary criticism, rhetoric, neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and experimental psychology. Each of these fields has its own goals, technical vocabulary, favorite variables, and theories linking variables. Since academics are trained in specific disciplines (technical communication, rhetoric, composition, or instructional design), they would need to branch into new disciplines.
Universities, working in conjunction with the STC, could attack the issue in a couple of ways. One way is for faculty to develop expertise in a common core of theories and research methodologies, and then to add expertise in specialized areas. For example, individual faculty could work from a basic understanding of qualitative and quantitative research in technical communication, and then to branch out into the theories and methods of fields such as composition or cognitive psychology. University departments would cover the range of technical communication issues by having faculty with complementary expertise. This approach assumes that universities could agree on the core material of the discipline.

A second way is for universities specialize in particular approaches to technical communication, with most of the faculty having expertise in the same kind of theories and research. This approach assumes that specialization is viable or rewarding for university departments.

Currently, technical communication programs are located on a continuum between the two approaches. Since the field is changing so quickly, universities will need follow suit. We have an opportunity to redefine what the hub and spokes of the new technical communication will be.