



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 2, Research

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 1, Education"

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 issues facing the STC academic community are many, but the two main focuses of the discussion center on education and research. STC members who work in institutes of higher education will see these two topics as central to their work mission. These two issues also serve as productive starting place for defining their relationship with the larger membership of STC, many of whom work in the high tech industries, government, do independent work, or work in other, non-academic settings.

The topic of **research** is relevant to persons interested in the contribution that this community makes to the profession. Attendees will learn about structures of research, goals and how STC can provide value to this community, the relation between theory and practice from a research standpoint, strategies STC can implement to support research and establish a creative partnership among researchers and practitioners.

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 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 the following (sample questions): *(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: publication venues, academic forums, funding for research
- 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 academic participation (other than during final exams, for example)?
- Ways to provide a “**visible presence**” as a way of serving members: how can we promote *TC* as a publication venue, how can we guarantee representation on important STC boards and conference planning committees?
- Ways to **grow and strengthen** the academic community within STC: how can the STC academic community parallel or complement other research communities in technical communication, such as ATTW, ACM, or CPTSC?

Additional questions might include:

- What are some ways that the research of academic members can feed back into the practitioner community?
- How can academic members establish research agendas that address questions in the profession?
- In what ways can STC provide value to the academic researching community?
- What are some ways that research interests overlap with educational and service interests?

4. Each panelist will give a brief summary statement.

Co-presenters:

Research: Research as a Vision for the Future of STC

Dr. Deborah S. Bosley, Director
Center for Writing, Language, and Literacy
UNC Charlotte

Research: The Tenure and Promotion Process: STC Opportunities Available and Missing

Roger Munger
Internship Director
Department of English
Boise State University

Research: Researchers and Practitioners: A Meeting of the Minds through STC

Jan H. Spyridakis
Professor
Department of Technical Communication
University of Washington

Research: Serving Two Masters? The Relationship of *Technical Communication* to the Academy and Industry

George Hayhoe
Technical Communication Department
School of Engineering
Mercer University

Research: Establishing Collaborative Research within the STC Academic Community

Henrietta Shirk
Chair, Professional & Technical Communication Dept.
Montana Tech of The University of Montana Tech

Research: A "Dangerous" Venture? Establishing Peer-Review Networks Between STC Practitioners and Academics

Prof.Amanda Goldrick-Jones
Director, Centre for Academic Writing
University of Winnipeg

Research: Ways that STC Can Support Research

David Dayton
Assistant Professor of Technical Communication
Southern Polytechnic State University

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 in the establishment of 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, students, promotion, respect, partnerships, vision, transformation

Abstracts

Research: Research as a Vision for the Future of STC

Dr. Deborah S. Bosley, Director
Center for Writing, Language, and Literacy
UNC Charlotte

One of the primary services that academics can provide to practitioners and, hence, to STC, is to conduct and disseminate research that is relevant to the practitioners and academics who constitute the field of technical communication.

Ann Blakeslee and Rachel Spilka, in a recent article in *Technical Communication Quarterly* (2004, Volume 13), decry the lack of research in our field. We have "common knowledge" and "proven practices," but little research to substantiate our practices. My presentation will list a series of proposed research questions and why it's important to substantiate our practice with solid research.

What I plan to focus on is a discussion of why we need more research that can be understood and used by both academics and practitioners. We serve the greater good of the entire STC community by using our strengths (research and clear writing) to accommodate the needs of STC members. We also need to disseminate those research results in publications like *TC*, but also to professional trade publications (*ASTD*, *AMA*, for example).

Research: The Tenure and Promotion Process: STC Opportunities Available and Missing

Roger Munger
Internship Director
Department of English
Boise State University

Along my path to tenure and promotion, I have been actively involved in STC. When I received my membership renewal notices early in my career, I was always quick to renew. However, for the past two years I have hesitated renewing my membership. I have paused a little longer each year and asked, "What do I get for \$140?" Now with tenure and promotion behind me, I am spending longer reflecting on the value of my STC membership. Having held tenure-track positions at universities in three different time zones, I have had many STC opportunities such as participating in local chapter activities, starting an award-winning student chapter, delivering presentations at conferences, serving on the technical program team for an annual conference, reviewing journal manuscripts, and publishing in STC publications. I have also witnessed first-hand the value placed on these experiences by annual/T&P review committees at three different universities.

Although these opportunities helped my tenure and promotion case, I wished there were more opportunities for junior faculty. In this panel discussion, I plan to explore the ways STC can provide more value to academic members in the early years of their careers. As a faculty member working toward tenure and promotion, I wished STC offered the following:

- Funding for beginning researchers.
- Funding for pilot research or smaller-scale studies.
- Access to industry sites and practitioners willing to participate in research studies.
- Access to industry partners interested in participating in service-learning courses.
- Early-career teaching and emerging-scholar research awards for faculty within the first five years of their careers.
- Help educating faculty outside the technical communication discipline of the value of STC-related activities.
- More advanced and varied opportunities to update technical communication knowledge and skills.

- Leadership opportunities within the STC organizational structure earmarked specifically for academic members.

STC can provide value to the academic community by providing at the both the regional and international levels opportunities like the above in a more visible and formal manner.

Research: Researchers and Practitioners: A Meeting of the Minds through STC

Jan H. Spyridakis

Professor

Department of Technical Communication

University of Washington

Faculty in technical communication programs have a responsibility to help students become active researchers and practitioners of technical communication, and to share their research and experiences with established practitioners of technical communication. Academics must also actively listen to the experiences of established practitioners. Because academics, both faculty and students, read and conduct research in technical communication, these scholars are in an excellent position to help transform the practices of technical communication. Likewise, many members of the Society for Technical Communication as practitioners of technical communication are in an excellent position to best tell the story of what technical communicators experience and need to know—they are also the people who will be the future employers of technical communication students.

Those in the academy must facilitate discussion between these parties, involve their students in this discussion, help their students meet the people who are on the front lines, and formulate research questions that will lead to improved practices for technical communicators. The strategies for making such connections within STC are numerous: attending and presenting at national, regional, local, and student chapter meetings; supporting student applications for STC scholarship awards and membership in the STC honors society (Sigma Tau Chi); and conducting research of relevance to STC members and sharing the results through conferences, proceedings, *Intercom*, and *Technical Communication*. If these approaches are not viable for faculty and students in technical communication programs, then those in academia and in industry must discuss the options and find new ways to create connections between researchers and practitioners.

Research: Serving Two Masters? The Relationship of *Technical Communication* to the Academy and Industry

George Hayhoe

Technical Communication Department

School of Engineering

Mercer University

The mission of STC's journal is to serve the needs of both practitioners and academics in our field. It publishes the results of research, theoretical contributions, case studies, and reports on significant technical communication methods that practitioners can use on the job.

To be useful to practitioners, the articles appearing in *Technical Communication* must be interesting to well-informed professionals and must be presented in such a way that they can understand and apply what they read to their jobs.

To be respected by academics, the journal must rigorously peer review manuscripts and publish only solid, reputable work. If *Technical Communication* does not meet this standard, it will neither attract the caliber of contributions needed to meet practitioners' needs nor recruit the best contributors.

This paper will demonstrate that *Technical Communication* does meet the needs of technical communicators in both academe and industry, and will suggest ways that the

new STC Academic Community can further enhance the journal's reputation and foster connections with colleagues in industry through the journal.

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.

Academics should come out with courses that address needs of new entrants 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 serve as a platform for the academics 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 academics 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 academics 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 Council could be the bridge between them. We should look at creating better training processes and better trained professionals.

Research: Establishing Collaborative Research within the STC Academic Community

Henrietta Shirk

Chair, Professional & Technical Communication Dept.

Montana Tech of The University of Montana Tech

Academics are strategically positioned to contribute to the practice of technical communication through research initiatives. Except for a limited number of ethnographic studies, most academics have conducted their research projects without a great deal of input from or collaboration with industry practitioners. Also, academics from different

higher education institutions typically have not established research partnerships with their colleagues at other colleges and universities. This presentation defines the parameters of an "ideal" research community, offering a vision of how the STC academic community could become the catalyst for broad-based research programs that involve input and contributions from different educational institutions, industries, organizations, and geographical locations. Using the concept of "community as a theme of the new century" (Mirel & Spilka, Reshaping Technical Communication, 2002) and the "Proposed Research Agenda for Technical Communication" published by the Milwaukee Symposium (2000), I propose establishing the following initiatives: (1) academic research consortia organized around research themes, rather than around individual researchers or institutions; (2) a database of academics seeking corporate sponsors and partners for research, and vice versa; and (3) additional research funding and more broadly disseminated research funding from STC, perhaps through establishing an STC foundation to which members from the corporate community could contribute (a variation on the model of the MIT Media Lab).

Research: A "Dangerous" Venture? Establishing Peer-Review Networks Between STC Practitioners and Academics

Prof. Amanda Goldrick-Jones
Director, Centre for Academic Writing
University of Winnipeg

One of our recent STC chapter initiatives, "The Venture Project," encouraged members to submit draft projects for academic-style peer review. We hoped to encourage more focus on process and more reflection on writing strategies. To gain more insights into what technical writers find important for students to know in a university-level course addressing technical communication theory and strategies, I submitted web site materials from a university-level online course I was revising. The practitioners reviewing my materials comprised a wide range of backgrounds and levels of expertise; none had any recent university experience.

Using this instance as a starting-point, I'd like to engage the following questions: Could this sort of peer-review network help bridge the classic "theory-practice" gap, or might it widen it? To what extent might practitioners' scrutiny of academic content complement or call into question academic goals, especially the current emphasis on having students critically evaluate the history and implications of "invisible" technical writing practices?

Research: Ways that STC Can Support Research

David Dayton
Assistant Professor of Technical Communication
Southern Polytechnic State University

I'd like to see the STC academic community do more to promote and facilitate empirical research in user-centered information design. Some ideas:

- Set up a research resource center on a website: guides and links to journals, proceedings, databases, TC server
- Blog discussion board on research topics, issues, methods
- Research interest database: faculty, students describe their interests; ability to do keyword searches to find others interested in same areas
- Add student research poster sessions to annual conference (profs could be co-authors, but work should be by *groups* of students); give some awards for outstanding empirical, collaborative research reported in poster sessions (and then encourage these teams to submit papers to TC)

- Create a revolving, one-year position in STC headquarters filled by an academic on sabbatical or leave: position would involve promoting the academic TC community, academic-industry connections, acting as "Research Dean" -- getting to know federal research agencies, visiting their program managers, lobbying agencies in certain programs to create opportunities to expand big-money projects to include information design and usability researchers from our field, compiling database of selected agency contacts and programs that seem particularly promising for research by TC faculty
- In conjunction with above, have the outgoing "Research Dean" present a panel at STC's annual conference summarizing the most promising research opportunities identified during his/her year in office. (To make the Research Dean position feasible, STC could partner with a local
- University: the visiting academic could teach one high-level undergrad or grad seminar in exchange for office space and enough adjunct's salary to cover cost of rental housing-or housing on campus if the university offers that option.)