Keynote

Thinking Like An Object

Dr. Stuart Selber, Professor of English and Director of Digital Education at Penn State University
Dr. Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Professor of Communication, Media, & Design at Clarkson University

Abstract: We offer a theoretical intervention into the work on posthumanism in technical communication, an intervention that encourages the field to recognize relationships between objects and users in different ways. Our intervention draws on the work of Deleuze and Guattari to reimagine how technical communication tends to think about the concept of assemblage. We apply this other view in makerspaces, illustrating what it buys us for practice and theory in complex sociotechnical contexts.

Bios:

Dr. Stuart Selber works in rhetoric at Penn State where he also directs the Penn State Digital English Studio. His most recent book is Institutional Literacies: Engaging Academic IT Contexts for Writing and Communication (University of Chicago Press, 2020).

Dr. Johndan Johnson-Eilola works at Clarkson University, where he teaches design. His most recent book is Solving Problems in Technical Communication (co-edited with Stuart Selber, University of Chicago Press, 2013).

SpeedTalks

DITA in Real Life

Sonja Striplin, Technical Communications Manager at Xylem

Abstract: You probably all know about Darwin Information Type Architecture (DITA) and its role in Technical Communications. What does that look like in practice in an enterprise environment, and what benefits do you gain? In this talk we will briefly discuss how the Sensus team develops content for reuse, using DITA to single source. We will touch on profiling for content, profiling for output, and look at a few examples.

Bio: Sonja L. Striplin manages the technical communications team at Sensus, a Xylem Brand. She holds an M.A. in Library and Information Science from the University of Arizona. She planned on being a librarian, but fell into technical writing in 1999 when writing manuals was 50% of a job she wanted. Along with managing her team,

Sonja still writes manuals, mostly in topic-based chunks, and remains happy doing so.

Content Audit and Gap Analysis of Perl's Core Documentation

Khawar Khan, CRDM Student at NC State University

Abstract: Perl – an open-source, general-purpose programming language – has a lot of documentation, organized in the form of articles and FAQs. With over 100 core documents, the users can easily get lost in the volume of the information, resulting in a bad user experience. This project aimed at resolving these issues and improving the structure of Perl's core documentation. The project was completed in 6 months under Google Season of Docs 2021, and divided into 4 phases: Content Audit, Gap Analysis, Information Architecture, and Roadmap for the Future. Good documentation is imperative for the success of an engineering tool. The existing documentation of Python, Prettier, and ESLint is a case in point. This project brought technical communication principles to documentation practices in engineering. The findings highlight the best practices in engineering communication, serving as an example that documentation teams can follow in the future.

Bio: Khawar Khan is a PhD student in the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media program at North Carolina State University. He has a graduate degree in Technical Communication and experience in the field of technical writing and editing, online information design, and content strategy.

Tech for Good: A Context for Community

Brandy S. Byrd, Software Development Manager at IBM

Abstract: Technical communication is a discipline that is rooted in producing fact-based content for various communities of users. From a pivotal technical communication course that I completed during my senior year at Clemson University, to each of the courses that I completed in the M.S. in Technical Communication program at NC State, my educational background in technical communication had a central theme: As professional communicators, we help bring technical solutions to the communities that need it most.

As an undergraduate, I learned that technical communication was a tool to help solve problems in the community. For example, I worked with a team of classmates who organized a health fair so that women had the resources they needed to get needed health information and screenings. Later, as a full-time technical writer and an alumnus of IBM's Corporate Service Corps, I created technical content and worked alongside government agency professionals in the Jujuy Province of Argentina to help women who were the victims of gender-based violence.

Since completing that course, and since traveling to Jujuy as a technical writer, I have served a community of users as a technical writer, technical editor, internal communications leader, and a software development manager of engineers, testers, and writers. A year ago, I was fortunate to discover Call for Code, a "Tech for Good" organization that brought my original expectations for technical communication to be a game changer for good, full circle. During my talk, I intend to showcase, through my professional experience, how technical communication is impacting real people – both development communities and end users of the technology – in ways that are changing lives for the good in areas of sustainability, racial justice, and crisis management.

Bio: Brandy S. Byrd wears many different-colored hats that all express her personal journey, which is multifaceted and broadly scoped. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Clemson University and a Master of Science degree in Technical Communication from NC State University.

Brandy has managed software engineers, content developers, and integration testers who deliver high-quality content within a continuous delivery model. She provides coaching in career development, Agile methodologies, and leadership development across global teams. She also teaches community Pilates classes to help promote healthier individuals and communities.

In her current role, Brandy is a software development manager from the Call for Code organization within IBM. Call for Code is about developing sustainable, open-source technology to address some of the world's biggest humanitarian challenges, by bringing technology to the communities that need it most.

What is ContentOps? Helping writers deliver docs faster

Carolyn Carpenter, ContentOps lead & Content Strategist at IBM

Abstract: Documentation - you spend hours writing it, and then with the click of a button, you publish. But who designed the processes you followed and tools you used to author and publish your docs? Enter Content Operations, or ContentOps, which combines people, processes, and technology to help writers deliver their content as seamlessly and efficiently as possible. In this speed talk, we'll discuss what ContentOps entails, how the role fits into a technical writing team, and skills needed to succeed in the role.

Bio: Carolyn Carpenter is a ContentOps lead and content strategist for IBM with 10 years of experience in the technical communication field. In her current role, she enjoys helping writers deliver content for IBM Cloud docs by designing build processes, documenting best practices for writers, and leading education sessions. She is a 2013 alumna of the Master of Science in Technical Communication program at NC State and also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and German from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Teaching Business Writing Students to Conduct Market Research Using Data Analytics Tools

Jianfen Chen, Rhetoric & Composition PhD Candidate, Purdue University

Abstract: In this Speed Talk, I will share with you my instructional experience of teaching students in courses of Business Writing for Certificate of Innovation and Entrepreneurship about how to do data-driven market research. When crafting their business plans, students face the challenge of conducting valid market research to gather information about their target market and customers. To help them address such challenge, I have designed a few scaffolding activities to guide them through the data-driven market research. Specifically, students learn to pose market research questions, explore applicable data analytics tools such as Google Trends, Similarweb, Statista, Ubersuggest, or Purdue Entrepreneur Database, and use one or more of these data analytics tools to gather data and answer their market research questions. Based on students' responses to this instructional design, they found that they have mastered the basics to do data-driven market research and are confident to carry out such market research on their own later.

Bio: Jianfen Chen is a PhD candidate in rhetoric and composition at Purdue University. She teaches undergraduate courses in professional writing and first-year writing. Her research focuses on technical and professional communication, public rhetorics, digital rhetoric, comparative rhetoric, and environmental and health risk communication. She is a winner of the 2022 CCCC Scholars for the Dream Travel Award and a couple of Purdue's research grants, scholarships, and fellowships. Her work appears in the International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, conference proceedings of ACM SIGDOC, and a few Chinese academic journals.

From enterprise to open source and back again: Considerations across software documentation sets

Art Berger, Technical Writer at Solo.io

Abstract: In this speedtalk, I discuss some take-aways I have learned from writing open-source documentation, enterprise software based on open source projects, and products that span both open- and closed-source doc sets together. These experiences are centered around cloud-native applications in the software development industry from my time as a technical writer at one of the oldest and largest enterprise technology companies

(IBM), a mid-sized startup (Red Hat), and my current company, a unicorn startup focused on cutting-edge technology (Solo.io). I'll share a rubric that I developed with an engineering lead to contrast the needs of open-source and enterprise documentation in terms of content development, lifecycle maintenance, and content access. As I explain the rubric, I'll reflect on different stages in my career where I learned these lessons, and what areas of technical communication that I think are important to prepare for what's coming next.

Practitioners can use the rubric helpful to make more informed decisions about how to manage and potentially single-source content across enterprise and open source documentation sets. Academics might find the rubric helpful as a teaching tool for content strategy and tools courses, as well as to make connections with their own research interests. Students can hear what skills are helpful as they grow into a technical writing role.

Bio: Art Berger works as a Technical Writer for enterprise and open source cloud services. He develops content for across a wide range of genres and interfaces, such as instructions, training materials, application program interface (API) documents, user interface (UI) text, command line interface (CLI) strings, error messages, videos, and diagrams. As the President of the STC Carolinas chapter, he enjoys helping people in the local area connect with other professionals, events, and resources to succeed in their tech comm pursuits.

An Introduction to Crisis Communication
Allison Fisk, Technical Writer at Allscripts

Abstract: I will be speaking on my personal experience as a science communicator, technical writer, website designer, office personal, lab technician, and journal article author. I will highlight the skills of a technical writer in research, usability, communication and other skills that make technical writers versatile and valuable. Most jobs require technical communication and there are some key base skills technical communicators have to fill a variety of roles.

Bio: I am currently a Technical Writer for Allscripts. Before that, I was an assistant editor for the NC sea grant. I have a bachelor's degree in Biology and a masters in Technical Communication. I have published several articles and summaries for coastwatch and have co-authored two journal articles in the crisis communication field, one of which has been published and the other pending publication.

Workshops

Resume 2.0 for automated screeners: Writing for intelligent machines in AI-assisted hiring
Dr. Huiling Ding, Professor & Director of MSTC at NC State University

Abstract: Job candidates are challenged by a different landscape of automated hiring enabled by the use of AI-assisted screening in recruiting. The combined use of ontologies, resume parsing, and semantic matching radically changes how resumes are evaluated today. Automated hiring puts AI as the algorithmic screener before forwarding only 30 percent of resumes to human readers. As a result, the way in which technical and business communication classrooms teach resumes needs major redesign to help students and future professionals to adapt to the new world of automated recruiting. This workshop will provide some quick overview of how AI tools evaluate resumes before offering hands-on guidance for "the Resume 2.0 project." It will teach students computational skills and corpus-assisted methods to perform job and resume parsing. It will also briefly cover strategies for students to revise their resumes to produce better matching results.

Bio: Dr. Huiling Ding is a Professor of English, a University Faculty Scholar, and Director of the MS in Technical

Communication program at North Carolina State University. Her research focuses on AI, intercultural professional communication, health communication, risk communication, technical communication, the rhetoric of health and medicine, and social justice.

Listening for Collaboration: Writing Strategies for Collaborative Work

Dr. Michelle McMullin, Assistant Professor at NC State University

Abstract: The distributed nature of our work across geographic distance and in multiple digital spaces has made the communication necessary for collaborative work more complicated, and nearly every aspect of our jobs includes writing in various forms: for instance, in documentation, project management, coordination, funding, marketing, and more. We are often "listening" to each other through text in digital work spaces and draft documents, and it can feel difficult to be heard or to know how to incorporate our individual ideas and expertise in a larger project. This workshop will focus on techniques for collaborative writing, with attention to how we can make our listening more visible in collaborative documents. Participants will hear a brief talk on how collaborative writing supports software development, grant funding, and research initiatives, and then practice some hands-on strategies for collaborative writing. A laptop or other digital device with access to Google Docs would be helpful for attendees.

Bio: Dr. Michelle McMullin is an assistant professor at NCSU. Her areas of expertise include technical communication, project management, team collaboration, and research methods.

Careers in User Experience

Willamina O'Keefe, Senior UX Designer at Lockheed Martin

Abstract: This workshop is for folks who are interested in starting a career in User Experience (UX), are curious about different roles within UX, or just want to learn more about UX. The workshop begins with an overview of the field of UX, current and emerging roles within UX, and ideas for growing UX skills and experience before landing that first job. The workshop then transitions to a collaborative activity focused on mapping out initial plans to start building a UX skill set and portfolio unique to each participant. Participants will leave the workshop with a broad understanding of career possibilities within UX and a custom, actionable plan for getting started.

Bio: Willa O'Keeffe (they/she) is a Senior UX Research & Design practitioner who graduated from the MSTC program in 2020. Willa loves using UX methods to create simple, desirable experiences across a range of use cases. But, they are most passionate about helping folks get started in their UX careers. Pineapple on pizza? Absolutely.

Preparing for Your MSTC Capstone Project (Information Session + Brainstorming)

Dr. Stacey Pigg, Associate Professor & Director of Professional Writing at NC State University

Abstract: This workshop will walk MSTC students through useful information for planning ahead toward completing capstone projects. We will begin with an information session for helping you understand what makes a good capstone project and follow up with tips for how to get started on a project literature review before the start of your second year in MSTC. The remainder of the workshop will include example presentations and advice from current capstone students. The session will include a Q & A in which attendees can ask questions about the capstone project, brainstorm possible project ideas, and/or contribute ideas that students might take up. The target audience for this workshop is students in the first year of the MSTC program; however, we welcome industry and academic participants who want to learn more about how the capstone project works or who may have project ideas to pitch to students.

Bio: Stacey Pigg, Associate Professor and Director of the Professional Writing Program, researches digital and networked writing practices that shape work, learning, and engagement. She teaches courses in rhetorical theory, professional communication, and digital rhetoric and writing. She serves on the editorial board of leading journals such as Written Communication and Communication Design Quarterly, is the Grants Coordinator for the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC), and was the 2020 Conference Chair for SIGDOC. In her role as the Director of the Professional Writing Program, Dr. Pigg works to support students across NC State in learning effective professional writing practices.

Panels

Technical Writing at Red Hat Panel
Jacob Berger, Samantha Gidlow, Sangeeta Raghu-Punnadi

Abstract: Technical Writers from Red Hat's Customer Content Services (CCS) host the panel, "Technical Writing at Red Hat." In this panel, Red Hatters will discuss what it's like being a Technical Writer at Red Hat. Our discussion topics will include:

- Career of a tech writer / day in the life
- Paths to promotions and changing to different roles
- How to keep skills sharp
- Valuable skills most people don't come into the discipline having and how to get these skills
- Transitioning to management of writers or leading a team of writers

Our panel wants to have a conversation with you! So please ask us your questions on technical writing, Red Hat, or whatever else you want to know!

Bios:

Jake Berger graduated with a M.A in English from NCSU in 2018 (he taught English 101 while he was here!). At Red Hat, Berger has been the Technical Writer for multiple brand new Red Hat products. Writing for new products, he has contributed to: identifying users along with their pain points and needs, creating and strategizing content, and staging iterations of development. In his free time, he enjoys long, sappy ballads from the '70s-'90s!

Samantha Gidlow started her journey into technical writing as an intern at Tekelec at the age of 15. From there she went onto work as a technical writing associate throughout her high school and college years for Tekelec and Oracle. She completed her undergraduate degree in Sociology at Meredith College. After Meredith College, Samantha worked for WebAssign for a brief period of time then moved onto SAS Institute. She completed her MBA during her tenure at SAS. Samantha joined the OpenShift team at Red Hat as the Senior Technical Writer in January 2021. She enjoys rooting for the Carolina Hurricanes, binge watching Frasier and Supernatural. Samantha is also working on her first fiction novel.

Sangeeta Raghu-Punnadi works as a Senior Content Strategist with Red Hat. During her technical writing journey, she has donned various hats. She has worked extensively on API documentation and has created non-traditional content, such as, microcopy, user onboarding flows, readmes, code messages, and so on. In her current role, she defines the content strategy that aligns with the product strategy. She is an active STC volunteer. She held the position of Secretary in the STC India Admin Council, 2020.

MSTC Students Yesterday and Today: Early Career Panel (IBM)

Catherine Airey, Daniel Miller, Rachel Amity Brown, Lauren Fulcher

Abstract: MSTC alumni and current students employed at IBM host the panel "MSTC Students Yesterday and Today: Early Career Panel (IBM)". In this panel, panelists will talk about getting started as a technical communicator at a large company, such as IBM. Discussion topics will include:

- Navigating the job search
- Preparing for skills tests
- Networking
- Day in the life working at IBM
- Learning new skills on the job
- How the MSTC program prepared you for your current role

And whatever other questions you have about getting started in a Technical Communication role at IBM. The goal is for this panel to be a conversation and panelists are excited to hear your questions!

Bios:

Catherine Airey graduated from the MSTC program in 2020 and is now employed as a Content Developer at IBM.

Daniel Miller graduated from the MSTC program in 2020 and is now employed as a Technical Writer for IBM's Cloud Products.

Rachel Amity Brown graduated from the MSTC program in 2016 and is now employed as a Tech Ethics Education Program Manager with IBM's Chief Privacy Office.

Lauren Fulcher is a current MSTC student graduating in May 2022. She is currently an Information Developer Co-op Intern with IBM's Cloud team.