The following articles on technical communication have appeared recently in other journals. The abstracts are prepared by volunteer journal monitors. If you would like to contribute, contact Sherry Southard at southards@ecu.edu.

"Recent and Relevant" does not supply copies of cited articles. However, most publishers supply reprints, tear sheets, or copies at nominal cost. Lists of publishers’ addresses, covering nearly all the articles we have cited, appear in Ulrich’s International Periodicals Directory.

Thanks to J. A. Dawson who helped me assemble the manuscript for "Recent & Relevant."

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**Collaboration**

**Assessing the value of corporate blogs: A social capital perspective**

“This three-phased study examines corporate blog use, specifically the impact and value of blogs on organizational social capital and knowledge sharing at Dell Inc., a global computer manufacturer. The impact of social-mediated Web 2.0 technologies on organizational social capital has received limited attention in scholarship, possibly because of the evident connection to measurable economic value and newness of the technology. Our findings indicate the corporate blog can be used as a sustainable forum leading to a shared understanding of organizational roles, increased sense of group cohesiveness, improved work processes, and improved professional and personal ties among employees in the organization.”

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**Information seeking in an information systems project team**

“Why does a team member prefer some colleagues to others in information seeking? Past literature suggests that the physical accessibility of a knowledge source, the information quality of the source, and relational concerns influence such a choice. This study extends past literature by suggesting that formal structural factors are also important. Particularly, job interdependence, competition, and supervisory relationships are hypothesized to affect information-sourcing frequency. Our social-network analysis of an information systems project team indicates that formal structural factors are important to the development of informal networks and the perception of the information quality of a source. They have direct and indirect impacts on sourcing behavior. Implications for information systems project management are discussed.”

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**Learning localization through trans-Atlantic collaboration: Bridging the gap between professions tutorial**

“In light of what has taken place since their presentation at the IEEE International Professional Communication Conference in 2005, the authors describe additional requirements and merits of matching technical writing students in the US with translation students in Europe in a collaborative assignment. Where the original article dealt with how to set up and organize the collaboration, this tutorial delves into the pedagogical challenges and the process dynamics involved in such an exchange, including mediation, power, and teamwork issues.”
**Miscommunication in international virtual workplaces: A report on a multicase study**


“What factors seem to cause miscommunication in international virtual workplaces? The research reported here seeks to respond to this question with a multicase study of 22 employees from three different types of international organizations. Interview data indicate that participants in this study emphasized the practical, day-to-day challenges of virtual workplaces; few of them had given thought to broader theories that might account for challenges— theories that are often presented in the literature of computer-mediated communication (CMC). In addition, participants in this study emphasized different factors than did CMC literature as most significant to causing miscommunication in international virtual workplaces.”

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**Technology alignment: A new area in virtual team research**


“Technology use and adaptation are the center of attention in research on virtual teams. Through empirical observations from six interpretative cases of virtual teams, we suggest conceptualizing the relationship between technology-use practices and collaborative practices as a technology-alignment process. We define technology alignment based upon four key perspectives on technology-use practices: continuous iterative process, reflection-on-action activities, malleability and reconfigurability, and transformation. Moreover, we show how these four key perspectives influence the design, the outcome, the task processes, and the socioemotional processes of the particular virtual team.”

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**Team listening environment (TLE) scale: Development and validation**


“Although past research has focused on the individual’s ability to listen and on the broader concept of communication satisfaction, limited attention has been devoted to the listening environment. This article develops the construct and measurement of a new scale, Team Listening Environment (TLE). Team listening environment is defined as the individual’s perception of behaviors demonstrating genuine attention and understanding by team members. This article investigates the individual perception of the listening environment within a variety of academic and professional contexts. Three studies were conducted for rigorous analysis of this latent construct using confirmatory factor analysis in the structural equation modeling function of EQS 6.1. Results suggest that TLE is a valid construct and a contributor to workplace commitment.”

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**Towards a pedagogy of relational space and trust: Analyzing distributed collaboration using discourse and speech act analysis**


“Distributed work is an increasingly common phenomenon in a number of technical and professional settings, and the complexity of this work requires high degrees of knowledge sharing and integration that move beyond assembly-line approaches to collaboration. Since participants in distributed-work settings rely almost exclusively on written and spoken language to mediate their collaborative relationships, professional communication faculty need educational approaches that empower students with language practices designed specifically to support effective teaming in these complex environments. To address this need, we employ discourse analysis and Speech Act Theory to identify these language practices in a case study of two cohorts of distributed, interdisciplinary, and cross-cultural student teams. The findings show correlations between language practices and successful collaboration. These correlations have significant implications for teaching and practice.”
Recent & Relevant Communication

Analyzing the genre structure of Chinese call-center communication

“This study investigates the genre structure of Chinese call-center discourse based on data collected from the call centers of a telecommunications company in China. Using an integrated theoretical framework informed by approaches to genre from English for specific purposes, systemic functional linguistics, and social perspectives, the study focuses on an analysis of the recurrent situation and social practices, the communicative purposes, the move structure, the exchange structure, and the generic-structure potential of call-center communication. A corpus-based quantitative analysis further reveals the dynamic complexity of interaction at call centers. The study compares Chinese and English call-center interactions in order to illustrate universal language functions as well as institutional and cultural differences in this professional discourse. The findings may have implications for both academics and practitioners in the call-center industry.”

Lyn Gattis

The co-construction of credibility in online product reviews

“Reviews of products on Web sites like Epinions.com make explicit the ways in which credible identities are co-constructed. Product reviews reveal not only how reviewers construct credibility for themselves but also how readers of reviews, through their comments about reviews, ratify and contribute to reviewer credibility. I present a framework and analyze examples of reviews of digital cameras to examine how reviewers of a technical product convey credibility and how review readers co-construct reviewers’ credibility. The framework and analysis can help identify those reviewers who are likely to influence review Web site users.”

Lyn Gattis

Explanations first: A case for presenting explanations before the decision in Dutch bad-news messages

“In argumentative texts, authors must choose between two presentation orders: providing the decision or claim first and then the explanation (direct order) or providing the explanation first and then the decision (indirect order). This study addresses which presentation order is most effective when the decision entails bad news by discussing two experiments that evaluate Dutch letters and e-mails. The first experiment evaluates denial letters from insurance companies and rejection letters to job applicants in which the presentation order is manipulated. The second experiment replicates the first, using a different medium (e-mail) and other instances of bad news. The results of both experiments indicate that readers perceive texts with the indirect order as more comprehensible and agreeable and its writer as more competent and empathic. Readers are also more inclined to comply with the decision in such texts when the explanation is presented first.”

J. A. Dawson

Productive management communication: Online and face-to-face

“This case study examined employees’ perceptions about the types of information management could productively communicate through electronic communication to augment face-to-face contact with employees. The benefits of effective face-to-face communication between managers and staff are widely appreciated; however, the costs associated with this mode of communication require organizations to make decisions about when scarce resources should be allocated for face-to-face communication and when the alternative, less costly resource of electronic communication could be substituted. The study determined that employees perceived human resource information that is private (confidential), personal, or sensitive as critical to receive through face-to-face contact. Employees perceived that information not
deemed confidential—meeting times, training times, policy changes, system problems, and information with numerous details—[was] just as productive and some even critical to receive through e-mail.”

J. A. Dawson

The readership of corporate websites

“This study investigates people’s interest in the content of corporate websites based on a survey of 521 respondents from Asia and Europe. Four main findings emerge from this study: (a) People are primarily interested in recruitment information and product-related information on corporate websites but not in corporate social responsibility messages or financial information; (b) content features on corporate websites are retrieved more frequently out of work-related interest than out of private interest; (c) utilitarian motivations provide more compelling reasons for people to visit corporate websites than hedonic motivations do; and (d) Internet users from Asia visit corporate websites for hedonic purposes to a far greater extent than respondents from Europe do.”

J. A. Dawson

The rhetoric of layoff memos: Beyond the craftsmanship tradition

This “Focus on Business Practices Column” includes short articles about layoff memos. In his introduction, DeKay explains the craftsmanship tradition that “originated from several early-20th century textbooks that portrayed sales letters as the archetypal form of written business communication. Advocates of the Craftsmanship Tradition emphasize the use of standardized approaches to structuring letters, depending on their objectives …. The contributors … embrace a broader vision of rhetoric than the ethos-dominated view espoused by the Craftsmanship Tradition.” The column consists of “Introduction to the rhetoric of layoff memos” (C. King, 320–322), “A close textual analysis of corporate layoff memos” (Q. Warnick, 322–326), and “The rhetoric of Chinese layoff memos” (L. S. Sisco and N. Yu, 326–342), along with appendixes (330–342) containing the six layoff memos the authors analyzed. C. King details the names and titles of authors, dates, and companies.

Sherry Southard

Design

Designing from data: Rhetorical appeals in support of design decisions

“This case study investigates how a group of novice technical communicators used appeals to support their design decisions during group meetings. The results of this ethnographic study suggest that although these technical communicators were well acquainted with user-centered design (UCD) concepts and claimed to actively practice UCD, their appeals often did not reference data collected within user-centered research and instead referenced designer-centric appeals to support their claims. This group’s overall use of appeals to support their design decisions suggests that more empirical study into UCD theory and practice as well as students’ argumentation skills is warranted.”

Lyn Gattis

Evaluating applications for an informal approach to information design: Readers respond to three articles about nursing

“Although books in the For Dummies series and other similar series have found commercial success, the approach to information design they use has not received much attention in technical communication journals. This article reports on readers’ responses to information presented in the magazine *Nursing Made Incredibly Easy!* and two other nursing journals. Three groups of readers (two groups of nursing students and
one group of nursing faculty members) responded to three articles they read by completing questionnaires and participating in focus groups. *Nursing Made Incredibly Easy!* was regarded as easy to read and as a good starting point for less-experienced readers, but its tone and style elicited some strong objections as well. The article provides observations and recommendations about using an informal approach to information design.”

Daniel Drahnak

**Relational genre knowledge and the online design critique: Relational authenticity in preprofessional genre learning**


“This study explores the types of feedback and implicated relational systems in an online design critique using an inductive analysis of an online critique about a project focused on designing a new food pyramid. The results reveal eight types of feedback and three implied relational systems, all of which suggest relational archetypes that are disconnected from typical preprofessional activity systems. These results illustrate the potential for the online medium to be a space in which participants pursue idealized relational identities and interactions that are not necessarily authentic approximations of actual relational systems. Using these results as a foundation, the author discusses the potential relevance of the online medium to this setting and the implications of relational authenticity and genre knowledge on oral genre teaching and learning.”

J. A. Dawson

**The ubiquity paradox: Further thinking on the concept of user centeredness**


“This essay argues that user centeredness has become ubiquitous and is in danger of being rendered meaningless. To address this problem, a meditative essay theorizes user centeredness by examining a base term—*use*—as defined through the ancient concepts of *techne* and the four causes of making. It concludes that user-centered design should employ the causes in order to avoid inversions during the development of all things technological.”

Lyn Gattis

**Awareness versus production: Probing students’ antecedent genre knowledge**


“This article explores the role of students’ prior, or antecedent, genre knowledge in relation to their developing disciplinary genre competence by drawing on an illustrative example of an engineering genre-competence assessment. The initial outcomes of this diagnostic assessment suggest that students’ ability to successfully identify and characterize rhetorical and textual features of a genre does not guarantee their successful writing performance in the genre. Although previous active participation in genre production (writing) seems to have a defining influence on students’ ability to write in the genre, such participation appears to be a necessary but insufficient precondition for genre-competence development. The authors discuss the usefulness of probing student antecedent genre knowledge early in communication courses as a potential source for macrolevel curriculum decisions and microlevel pedagogical adjustments in course design, and they propose directions for future research.”

Lyn Gattis
British Indian grammar, writing pedagogies, and writing for the professions: Classical pedagogy in British India

“Nineteenth-century freshman composition instruction at Madras University, based on a classical paradigm, prepared students for writing in professional discourses. Examining this pedagogy from today’s perspective raises, for the field of postcolonial theory, questions of whether the British, who offered Indians a curriculum comparable to those at important British universities, viewed Indians as inferior beings or those needing help to become modern.”

Lyn Gattis

Critiquing community engagement

“Universities increasingly cast themselves as engaged institutions committed to building collaborative relationships with community-based stakeholders. Although promoted in terms of empowerment, community engagement can reproduce or accentuate problematic social relations. This qualitative case study of a campus–community partnership provides a critical analysis of community engagement. The data reveal how the ambiguities of ‘community,’ including the politics associated with defining and representing local groups, complicate these initiatives. The analysis extends existing conceptualizations of community and community engagement by (a) illustrating how a campus/community divide serves as a rich source of critique and (b) demonstrating the need to reshape community engagement around a critical understanding of community and community representation. In addition to these contributions, this study provides a set of guidelines for future community engagement efforts.

Sherry Southard

Crossing global boundaries: Beyond intercultural communication

“This article analyzes the benefits of experiential learning in cross-disciplinary global learning environments by recounting work in the Global Classroom Project, which electronically links students and professors from Russia and America. The author asserts that students learn by experience what cannot be taught and claims that they benefit from synthesizing the viewpoints, ideologies, and frames of reference of diverse co-participants. In doing so, students prepare for a future in which synthetic thinking that leads to innovative, imaginative problem solving and invention will be desirable and necessary.”

Lyn Gattis

Integrating an executive panel on communication into an engineering curriculum tutorial

“Communication skills are key to the workforce success of engineering graduates. The Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering (ISyE) Workforce Communication Program at Georgia Tech has successfully incorporated executive panel interaction into its capstone design course to align student skills with executive expectations. The objectives of the panel are to raise student awareness about the importance of communication to workforce success and to gain knowledge about communication skills directly from executives. Executives interact directly with students about workforce communication, career advancement, and the communication skills they consider most critical. The process of assembling and holding a panel is described for potential implementation in other engineering programs.”

Jenny West
Integrating technical communication into China’s English major curriculum

“Previous research has suggested the need for developing technical communication education in Chinese universities. Following this suggestion, this article examines the possibility of integrating technical communication into China’s English major curriculum. Based on findings from two universities, the article discusses the design of China’s English major curriculum and Chinese teacher and student perspectives on technical communication. The author suggests that China’s English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education provides a promising home for integrating technical communication and that this integration can enhance China’s current ESP education. The author presents three integration models and discusses questions for future research.”

J. A. Dawson

Linking contextual factors with rhetorical pattern shift: Direct and indirect strategies recommended in English business communication textbooks in China

“Scholars have consistently claimed that rhetorical patterns are culturally bound, and indirectness is a defining characteristic of Chinese writing. Through examining how the rhetorical mechanism of directness and indirectness is presented in 29 English business communication textbooks published in China, we explore how English business communication textbook writers in China keep up with the contextual changes in the Chinese society and how the rhetorical mechanism of directness and indirectness is locally situated in the English business communication teaching practices in China. We conclude that the pedagogical strategy on directness and indirectness represented in Chinese English business communication textbooks echoes the same strategy favored by scholars in the United States.”

Daniel Drahnak

Outsourced: Using a comedy film to teach intercultural communication

“Given that feature films can enhance the teaching of intercultural communication, this article describes in detail how the 2006 comedy film, *Outsourced*, can be integrated into a course. The article relates the film to four different functions of film and shows how *Outsourced* can help create an intercultural experience for students, serve as the basis for a case analysis of cross-cultural adjustment, give meaning to cultural concepts, and create powerful metaphorical images to expand classroom discussions to broader issues. Also explored are ways the film can be used in teaching advanced intercultural communication concepts.”

J. A. Dawson

Students’ perceived preference for visual and auditory assessment with e-handwritten feedback

“Undergraduate business communication students were surveyed to determine their perceived most effective method of assessment on writing assignments. The results indicated students’ preference for a process that incorporates visual, auditory, and e-handwritten presentation via a tablet PC. Students also identified this assessment process would improve their writing by helping them understand the types of errors they were making and why these errors were incorrect. Students also indicated this type of assessment would help build a relationship with the instructor and help them be successful in the class.”

J. A. Dawson
**Toward an accessible pedagogy: Dis/ability, multimodality, and universal design in the technical communication classroom**


“This article explores the challenges and opportunities that the rising numbers of students with disabilities and the changing definition of disability pose to technical communication teachers and researchers. Specifically, in a teacher-researcher study that combines methods from disability studies, I report on the effectiveness of multimodal and universal design approaches to more comprehensively address disability and accessibility in the classroom and to revise traditional impairment-specific approaches to disability in technical communication.”

— Lyn Gattis

**Communication of corporate social responsibility: A study of the views of management teams in large companies**


“In light of the many corporate scandals, social and ethical commitment of society has increased considerably, which puts pressure on companies to communicate information related to corporate social responsibility (CSR). The reasons underlying the decision by management teams to engage in ethical communication are scarcely focused on. Thus, grounded on legitimacy and stakeholder theory, this study analyzes the views management teams in large listed companies have on communication of CSR. The focus is on aspects on interest, motives/reasons, users and problems related to corporate communication of CSR information. A questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews confirm that there is a distinct trend shift towards more focus on CSR in corporate communication. Whilst this trend shift started as a reactive approach initiated by the many corporate scandals, the trend shift is now argued to be of a proactive nature focused at preventing legitimacy concerns to arise …. [W]e are witnessing a transit period between two legitimacy strategies. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the way respondents argue when it comes to CSR activities coincides with consequentialism or utilitarianism, i.e. companies engage in CSR activities to avoid negative impacts instead of being driven by a will to make a social betterment or acting in accordance with what is fundamentally believed to be right to do.”

The authors also discuss implications for policymakers and stakeholders.

— J. A. Dawson

**Ethical Issues**

**Business ethics research: A global perspective**


“Using 10 years of publication data (1999–2008), from 10 leading business ethics journals, we examine global patterns of business ethics research and contributing institutions and scholars. Although U.S. academic institutions continue to lead in the contributions toward business ethics research, Asian and European institutions have made significant progress. Our study shows that business ethics research output is closely linked to the missions of the institutions driven by their values or religious belief. An additional analysis of the productivity of each highly ranked institution suggests that business ethics research is highly concentrated in a limited number of eminent scholars within each institution.”

— J. A. Dawson

**Constructing a code of ethics: An experiential case of a national professional organization**


Writers and editors who might be asked to prepare a code of ethics for their employers can benefit from “this paper [that] documents the development and implementation of an ethically valid code of ethics in a newly formed national professional organization …. It provides a model for code development that is
both practical and grounded in theory. Although the content of a code of ethics (‘the product’) provides guidance to organizational members in the conduct of everyday business, especially when they face ethically challenging situations, how the code is developed (the ‘process’) influences its ethical validity. Few published cases document an organization’s experience developing a code, and this is the first case … that provides a first-hand longitudinal account of an effective code development process.”

J. A. Dawson

**Employer’s use of social networking sites:**
**A socially irresponsible practice**


Although the article is directed to employers, both employers and employees in technical communication need to be aware of ways employers may be using social networking sites. “Millions of people are using social networking sites to connect with others, and employers are using these sites as a source of background information on job applicants. Employers report making decisions not to hire people based on the information posted on social networking sites. Few employers have policies in place to govern when and how these online character checks should be used and how to ensure that the information viewed is accurate. In this article, we explore how these inexpensive, informal online character checks are harmful to society. Guidance is provided to employers on when and how to use these sites in a socially responsible manner.”

J. A. Dawson

**Framing and counterframing the issue of corporate social responsibility:**
**The communication strategies of Nikebiz.com**


“This article reports on the communication strategies that sports shoe giant Nike used to successfully protect its corporate social responsibility (CSR) reputation during the late 1990s. The article opens with a brief discussion of CSR and its critical importance to transnationals such as Nike. The opening also includes four research questions guiding this study. The article then discusses why frame analysis offers such a potentially rich approach to analyzing public relations controversies like this one. The Analysis section of the article examines how an anti-Nike coalition initially succeeded in imposing negative frames on two CSR issues and how this framing generated highly negative media coverage. The remainder of this section provides a detailed commentary on eight Web texts from Nikebiz.com and how the framing strategy behind these texts enabled the company ultimately to defend, even to enhance its CSR reputation.”

J. A. Dawson

**Information Management**

**Delivering more than text**


The company where the authors work “has always produced context-sensitive help, stand alone HTML help and guides, and PDF help and other guides, along with the occasional workbook and quick reference card …. [They share their experiences with] new types of information: videos, guided tours, and even a comic book …. [They also share] why we turned to these output types, how it all worked, and what lessons we’ve learned in the process.”

Sherry Southard

**It all starts with standards**


“Although the best practices of highly efficient information development groups clearly indicate a need for standards, the trick is in knowing what to include and how to obtain buy-in. This article provides suggestions for how to get started defining your standards …. [by discussing] driving factors,
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Contents, product definitions, job responsibilities, tools, file management, workflow, project management, editorial, graphic design and photography, audio/video, formatting (style sheet) standards, instructional design, e-learning, interface design, testing, XML standards, implementation, buy-in, communication, training, accessibility, enforcement, change control … [and] return on investment.”

**Sherry Southard**

**Reducing context in modular documents**


“This article argues that by adopting context-agnostic writing techniques for topic-based modular documentation, technical writers can improve content reuse and achieve greater efficiency through the technical documentation life cycle without significantly compromising quality. In some cases, context can simply be removed from topic modules, but when critical to meaning, it is possible to move context from the topic to a document specification or map. This separation of context from content mirrors the more common separation of content and form fundamental to many XML applications.”

**Sherry Southard**

**Supporting people where they need it, when they need it**


According to the author, with “customized user assistance and dynamic content, users experience a 30 percent increase in productivity …. Tools and technology … [exist that change] user support from content-generic to content-specific assistance …. Moment of Need content is content that finds the user, appearing in the workspace as the user navigates daily tasks …. [The author advises readers to] carefully evaluate any dynamic publishing tool to ensure that it fits your workflow and authoring tools to provide the best experience for your users.”

**Sherry Southard**

**Legal Issues**

**Beyond plain language: A learner-centered approach to pattern jury instructions**


“Before a jury begins deliberation, judges provide instructions to guide jury decision-making. Unfortunately, extant literature has demonstrated poor comprehension of these instructions. Although there have been attempts to simplify the language of these instructions, plain language may not be enough to ensure comprehension. Instead, the principles of technical communication advocate the adoption of a learner-centered perspective and suggest increased novice-expert interactions to assist jurors in comprehending the task assigned to them.”

**J. A. Dawson**

**English agricultural and estate management instructions, 1200–1700: From orality to textuality to modern instructions**


“This article discusses the history and development of English agriculture and estate management instructions, 1200–1700, as these shifted from oral to textual forms. Beginning with manuscript treatises that influenced important instruction books printed in the 16th century, the article shows how major agricultural writers developed instructions for a range of users. By the close of the 17th century, agricultural and estate management books exemplified increasingly modern presentation and style.”

**Lyn Gattis**
Copyright, free speech, and democracy: 
Eldred v. Ashcroft and its implications for technical communicators

“This article explains the Constitution’s intellectual property provision and its goals, then deconstructs the Supreme Court’s decision in Eldred v. Ashcroft as a means to unravel the pieces in the complex relationship among the constitutional provision, the First Amendment, and copyright. The article then considers how an understanding of the relationship of these elements can be helpful for considering the positions of technical communicators as both users and producers of intellectual products.”

J. A. Dawson

Guest editors’ introduction: Technical communication and the law

“This special issue features articles that address legal issues as they relate to technical communication research, pedagogy, and practice. The articles will assist instructors who wish to engage classes in activities that allow students to understand, analyze, and respond to legal dilemmas related to workplace activities. The articles will also highlight contemporary subjects for research inquiry in technical communication, including the relationship between technical communication and civic engagement, which often depends on the study of legal processes. It is our hope that this special issue will generate interest in the intersection of technical communication and the law and that it will provide readers of TCQ with a valuable and unique foundation for teaching and research in this area.”

J. A. Dawson

A legal discourse of transparency: 
Discursive agency and domestic violence in the technical discourse of the excited utterance exception to hearsay

“This article analyzes the effects of a transparency view of language that is implicit in some technical discourses. Using a legal concept, the excited utterance exception to hearsay, as an exemplary discourse, I show that this view of language is predicated on social norms rather than empirical standards. Indeed, I argue, the measurement of accuracy using an empirical standard creates a situation in which the speaker’s rhetorical concerns and the context can be ignored.”

J. A. Dawson

Legal literacy: Coproducing the law in technical communication

“This article discusses the need for technical communicators to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between law and their work. The author reviews the discipline’s literature regarding the relationship between law and technical communication and argues that technical communicators must learn to see themselves as coproducers of the law. To that end, the author offers pedagogical strategies for helping technical communication students develop skills for recognizing the legal implications of their work.”

J. A. Dawson

Monitoring changes to federal health IT privacy policy: A case study in punctuated equilibrium

“Applying the communication theory called punctuated equilibrium to an activity system in the federal department that oversees health-information privacy reveals that the theory fails to align well with a government activity system rooted in a stable
democratic tradition. This activity system is structured to accommodate a wide variety of stakeholders and significant organizational change. This case study prompts a reexamination of punctuated equilibrium as an approach to understanding the role of documents in certain types of activity systems.”

J. A. Dawson

**A multi-perspective genre analysis of the barrister’s opinion: Writing context, generic structure, and textualization**


“In teaching and researching English for Law, considerable effort has been put into the fine-grained description of legal genres and accounts of associated legal literacy practices. Much of this work has been carried out in the academic context, focusing especially on genres encountered by undergraduate law students. The range of genres which must be taught in professional legal writing and drafting courses is comparatively underresearched in the applied linguistics literature. This article explores one such underresearched genre, the barrister’s opinion. The article reports the findings of a genre analysis (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990), drawing on the written opinions of five Hong Kong barristers, individual interviews with the barristers, and data from background information questionnaires. The study adopts a multi-perspective approach to genre analysis, drawing on the accounts of specialist informants to explain the genre as socially situated rhetorical action. Thus, the genre is analyzed in terms of its intertextual and interdiscursive writing context, generic move structure, and lexico-grammatical textualization. It is suggested that the findings may usefully be applied to the teaching of legal writing and drafting in a variety of contexts.”

Sherry Southard

**Research**

**Linguistics from the perspective of the theory of models in empirical sciences: From formal to corpus linguistics**


“The authors examine language from the perspective of models of empirical sciences, which discipline studies the relationship between reality, models, and formalisms. Such a perspective allows one to notice that linguistics approached within the classical framework share a number of problems with other experimental sciences studied initially exclusively within that framework because of making the same sort of assumptions. By examining solutions to some of these problems found in contemporary science, the authors point out alternative approaches, which could be relevant for linguistics research, and some of which have already been tested in language studies. In particular, Corpus Linguistics is presented as an especially promising approach, positioned to avoid many of the pitfalls of the classical framework. Consequently, it seems that the future of linguistics, from theoretical to applied, such as Technical Writing, must be embraced by Corpus Linguistics research.”

Daniel Drahnak

**Quantitative content analysis: Its use in technical communication**


“Quantitative content analysis can enrich research in technical communication by identifying the frequency of thematic or rhetorical patterns and then exploring their relationship through inferential statistics. Over the last decade, the field has published few content analyses, and several of these applications have been qualitative, diluting the method’s inherent rigor. This paper describes the versatility of quantitative content analysis and offers a broader application for its use in the field. This discussion frames two original case studies that illustrate the design variability that content analysis offers researchers.”

Jenny West
Recent & Relevant

**Seeking a direct pipeline to practice: Four guidelines for researchers and practitioners**


“The authors of this article, a researcher and a practitioner, revisit the collaborative process by which a training program addressing report writing for police officers was developed and implemented as a means of understanding why and how this collaboration was successful. From this reflection, the authors offer four guidelines for others involved in similar efforts to help them obtain a direct pipeline to practice.”

*J. A. Dawson*

**Scientific Writing**

**Writing material in chemical physics research: The laboratory notebook as locus of technical and textual integration**


“This article, drawing on ethnographic study in a chemical physics research facility, explores how notebooks are used and produced in the conduct of laboratory science. Data include written field notes of laboratory activity; visual documentation of *in situ* writing processes; analysis of inscriptions, texts, and material artifacts produced in the laboratory and assembled in notebooks; and an in-depth interview with an expert chemist whose research and writing formed the basis of this investigation. Findings from this study suggest that the notebook occupies a negotiated space between the scientist’s contingent response to exigency in the laboratory and the genre-specific strategies that he or she deploys to communicate his or her work outside the laboratory. …. This article ultimately offers a methodical approach for investigating how the material, technical, and symbolic dimensions of writing and text converge in a modern scientific workplace.”

*Sherry Southard*

**Technology**

**Long live the Web**


“On the 20th anniversary of the World Wide Web (www), the man widely acknowledged as its creator, Tim Berners-Lee, writes that the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has developed the Web into a powerful tool deeply embedded in our human experience because the Web was built by a great number of people working individually and as part of universities, companies, and government entities. He asserts that from the first, the Web was based on egalitarian principles. However, he discusses ways that the Web is currently being threatened and suggests ways to increase the value of the Web.”

*Gary Hart*

**Writing**

**The communication habits of engineers: A study of how compositional style and time affect the production of oral and written communication of engineers**


“Writing is common skill for many whose job requires them to communicate through business documents. But there are many professionals who seemingly have difficulty with writing. Many engineers are required to write proposals and reports yet have received little formal writing instruction. The purpose of this study was to determine if writing apprehension, their composition process, or the presence of deadlines affects the production of documents. The hypothesis was that engineers have high writing apprehension, generally use a product-based approach, and tight deadlines negatively affect the end quality. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with civil engineers to gauge their level of apprehension, learn their personal composition process and determine how deadlines affect their
writing. While the hypothesis was not conclusively supported, the study revealed six key themes into how engineers structure their writing tasks and found that the writing environment of engineers significantly impacts the composition process.”

Daniel Drahnak

**I, pronoun: A study of formality in online content**


“This article presents the results of a study that investigated readers’ perceptions of tone formality in online text passages. The study found that readers perceived text passages to be less formal when they contained personal pronouns, active voice verbs, informal punctuation, or verb contractions. The study reveals that professional communicators can impact their readers’ perceptions of tone in online passages. This study provides useful guidance for writers who wish to understand the impact of their stylistic decisions on audience perceptions of passage formality.”

Daniel Drahnak

**Secret sauce and snake oil: Writing monthly reports in a highly contingent environment**


“At a search marketing company, each search engine optimization (SEO) specialist writes up to 10 to 12 complex 20-page monthly reports in the first ten business days of each month. These SEO specialists do not consider themselves to be writers, yet they generate these structurally and rhetorically complex reports as a matter of course, while negotiating a constantly changing landscape of a contingent, rapidly changing business sector. Under these conditions, how did the SEO specialists manage to write these reports so quickly and so well? What is the standing set of transformations that they enact in order to develop and produce these reports? And given the multiple contingencies, rapid changes, and high individual discretion at this organization—seemingly a recipe for dis cohesive practices—how did they maintain and develop this standing set of transformations in order to turn out consistent reports? In this article, I draw on writing, activity, and genre research (WAGR) to examine how Semoptco’s SEO specialists produced monthly reports, specifically in terms of their constant networking, audience analysis, and ethos building. Finally, I draw implications for applying WAGR to knowledge work organizations.”

Sherry Southard