An annual magazine for alumni and friends of the University of Washington’s Department of Technical Communication

Summer 2008

UWTC Welcomes New Faculty and Chair
New Undergraduate HCI Curriculum
PhD Grad Secures Academic Position
Student and Faculty Research and Travel
Alumni In the Real World
2007-2008 has been another extremely eventful year for TC! Perhaps most importantly for our future, we are delighted to announce that we have hired three new assistant professors—Sarah Kriz, Charlotte P. Lee, and Julie Kientz. Sarah comes to us with a doctorate in psychology from UC-Santa Barbara and underlying degrees in linguistics. Her current focus is on cognition and communication, especially human-robot communication. Charlotte has a doctorate in information studies from UCLA and underlying degrees in sociology; her work is in cyberinfrastructure and cooperative work. Julie (a joint faculty hire with the UW Information School) has a doctorate in computer science from Georgia Institute of Technology; her current work focuses on developing ubiquitous computing applications to support caregivers of children with special needs. These three superb additions to our faculty reflect the department’s strong commitment to interdisciplinary research in human-computer interaction as a major direction for our discipline in the future.

This year we also produced our first doctoral graduate to take an academic position! We are very proud to announce that Quan Zhou will be joining the faculty in technical communication at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Quan conducted his doctoral research under the direction of Prof. David Farkas. Quan’s achievement takes our young doctoral program a great step forward in joining the national (and international) growth of the academic community in our discipline.

Finally, I am delighted to announce that the department will begin the next academic year with a new chair! Prof. Jan Spyridakis, known internationally for her first-class scholarship, teaching, and service to the profession, will be taking over this position as of August 1. Jan brings enormous energy and gifts to the job; I look forward to seeing us progress in new and exciting directions under her leadership. And, after eleven years as chair, I will be heading off on a year’s sabbatical! I look forward to re-charging my batteries and preparing for the next phase of my career. Serving as chair of this wonderful department has been the most rewarding experience of my life, and I thank all of my friends among the faculty, staff, and students for working with me and challenging me in so many fruitful ways and for providing me with a wealth of wonderful memories.

Thanks to you all!

Judy Ramey announces three new hires and plans for her own sabbatical after serving as chair for 11 years.

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posTComm Team 2008

Back Row: Juliana Chaumette writer/editor; Eliot Yamaguchi writer/editor; Amy Monroe writer/editor, layout; Julia Ricketts writer/editor; Jonathan Morgan project manager
Front Row: Shalina Bajracharya writer/editor, photographer; Sarah Jamaludin editor, layout
Not pictured: Contributing writers Amanda Ahn, Maggie Bardacke and Kirsten Gantenbein; “In the Real World” editor Devor Barton; Advisers Kate Long and Judy Ramey
Expanding the Horizon of Technical Communication with Three New Professors

TC is very excited to welcome three new assistant professors to our faculty next year! Sarah Kriz, Charlotte Lee, and Julie Kientz all work in the broad area of human-computer interaction (HCI), but each brings a distinctive focus to the field.

Kriz’s current work is in human-robot interaction (HRI). Lee’s interdisciplinary focus applies ethnographic studies and qualitative research to understanding cyberinfrastructure and cooperative work. And Kientz (whom TC is hiring jointly with the UW Information School) studies ubiquitous computing in computer-supported cooperative work.

Kriz and Lee both commented that when they read the job description for an assistant professorship at the UW, it sounded like the perfect job. During her UW visit, Kriz was impressed by the interdisciplinary nature of the TC department and the large HCI community at UW with students and faculty from diverse academic backgrounds.

Lee said the UW’s reputation as a great research university added further appeal: “The resources like DUB and the mindset here provide fertile ground for a young scholar to grow, particularly in the area of HCI and Design.” Kientz agrees and looks forward to deepening the research and teaching relationship between TC and the iSchool as well as being active in the broader DUB coalition. She adds that she is “very excited about coming” to TC and UW.

These three scholars bring remarkable scientific and technical depth to the study of topics that are rapidly growing in importance in our field.

Sarah Kriz
Kriz’s focus is on cognition and communication; her current work is in HRI, but her interests also include visual and spatial communication, the role of gesture in communication, and the effects of animation on learning. She holds a doctorate in cognitive psychology from the University of California at Santa Barbara and master’s and bachelor’s degrees in linguistics.

She is currently finishing her postdoctoral research position at the Navy Center for Applied Research in Artificial Intelligence in Washington, DC. As part of her postdoctoral work, she is completing an experiment in which undergraduates at George Mason University communicated with Aibo, a robotic dog made by Sony. When she gets to UWTC, she will work with a much more sophisticated robot in a lab created for her so that she can run experiments in which the robot moves around and interacts with humans in a range of ways.

“...In addition to being first-class scholars, these three new faculty are personable, pleasant, and student-centered people.”

- Judy Ramey

In the fall, she will be offering a graduate seminar on Cognition and Communication in HCI; the seminar will cover both how cognition and social factors shape the way people use technology as well as how intelligent systems can be designed to match the cognitive and communicative needs of humans.

In Spring 2009, she will offer a directed ongoing research group on HRI that focuses on collecting empirical data and building theories in HRI.

Charlotte Lee
Lee, who will start in Winter Quarter 2009, currently holds a position as a research scientist in the Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. She holds a PhD in Information Studies from the University of California at Los Angeles and bachelor’s and master’s degrees in sociology.

Lee’s postdoctoral work has examined cooperative work among groups and settings as diverse as a distributed team of neuroscientists, a team of museum kiosk designers, and a group of hobbyists. She is particularly interested in how groups use communication processes and artifacts to get their work done.

As she said, “collaborative design is a complicated activity that requires coordination, the use of shared representations, and joint learning. When complex activities require coordination amongst disciplines or across time or space, collaboration can be..."
HCI Initiative Breaks New Ground with Undergraduate Concentration

The HCI Initiative, an interdisciplinary group formed by Technical Communication with the Computer Science and Engineering departments, the School of Art, and the iSchool, recently announced a new interdisciplinary curriculum for undergraduates. The HCI concentration will increase opportunities for undergraduates to study human-computer interaction-related coursework in other departments, and introduce them to different aspects of this rapidly expanding discipline.

Judy Ramey, Chair of the Technical Communication department, is excited for the opportunities that these offerings will provide to TC undergraduates. She said she believes that first-hand experience of each department’s unique perspective on human-computer interaction will give students a “diversified look at HCI as a practice and a set of theories.”

The curriculum offers a selection of classes in five major areas of study: Foundations, User Interface Software and Technology, Design, Usability and User Research, and Social and Ethics Dimensions.

Technical Communication offers classes in four of the five study areas, such as TC319 Survey of Concepts in Human-Computer Interaction, TC438 Web Technologies, and TC455 User Interface Design. The new curriculum will be available as an official transcript option by September 2009, but TC students can take advantage of the classes starting this September.

Ramey said students have been a driving force behind interdisciplinary HCI efforts at the UW all along: “One of the most exciting aspects of the HCI Initiative has been the extent to which the students themselves have found the pathways.”

She also noted, with obvious pride, that TC students have gained an excellent reputation through their participation in classes in other departments: “As soon as faculty outside our department have an experience with a TC student, we no longer have any trouble getting our students into their courses.”

The curriculum adds a new pillar to the rapidly expanding HCI Initiative, which is also responsible for the DUB (Design Use Build) group. This year, a proposal by HCI Initiative faculty was one of only four selected by the UW to be submitted to the National Science Foundation’s Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) program for a prestigious grant awarded annually to researchers with interdisciplinary backgrounds.

“We have established ourselves in a few short years as a major player in HCI education internationally,” said Ramey. “And we’re going to build on that.”

Future plans for the HCI Initiative include more education and research grant proposals, further interdisciplinary research and study opportunities for students and faculty, and eventually even a physical home for the Initiative. But Ramey encourages students to continue to involve themselves in the many HCI activities available to them right now—inside the TC department and out—such as the weekly Wednesday DUB group meetings and the TC521 speaker series.

“One of the most exciting aspects of the HCI Initiative has been the extent to which the students themselves have found the pathways.”

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posTComm is Recognized for Third Straight Year

In January, the 2007 posTComm won recognition at the Puget Sound STC Competition Showcase for its commendable writing and design. The local showcase is held annually by the Puget Sound chapter to recognize outstanding works in the field of TC. The showcase included award winners in categories of technical art, online communication, and technical publication.

PosTComm received a Merit Award for demonstrating exceptional TC principles within the publication category.

At the STC Showcase, UWTC Chair Judy Ramey and other members of the posTComm team were on hand to present and discuss the 2007 posTComm with the attendees. Headed by Rosalinda Rosales, the 2007 team continued the success of previous teams by winning an award for the third straight year.

PosTComm is a yearly publication produced by >> page 5
An Interaction Design Showcases a New Way to Volunteer

UWTC master’s student Matt Carthum, along with five teammates, created an interaction design project to maintain the health and wellness of communities by investigating a new way to recruit volunteers.

As part of a class taught by Professor Axel Roesler in the Art School’s Projects in Interaction Design, Carthum collaborated with Kris Martin, Craig Panthen, Jaclyn Knapp, Zachary Krane, and Brian Smith, whose academic backgrounds included industrial engineering, visual design and computer engineering.

The project was so well received that Roesler and Microsoft liaison George Petschnigg selected it to participate in the 2007 Microsoft Design Expo.

Each year Microsoft selects a topic for the Design Expo and invites schools from all over the world to showcase exceptional designs in computing and interaction. The annual expo is part of the Microsoft Research Faculty Summit and, according to Microsoft’s website, is “the premier opportunity for academic researchers and educators to join with Microsoft employees for in-depth presentations and discussions of computing challenges and research trends.”

Carthum’s project, dubbed “The Pollenteering Network,” is a new form of interaction designed to get people in the community involved in volunteer activities. Through their research, Carthum and his group started the project with the understanding that most people are willing to volunteer, but only do so when asked. Using pollination as the driving metaphor, the Pollenteering Network was designed to spread information from one person to another through close physical proximity.

The group designed the project so that an event organizer can inform potential volunteers about the event by “pollinating” that information to others through the use of a cell phone. Then those phones receiving information can pollinate other phones. For any cell phone set up with the Pollenteering Network, the process of sending and receiving information would be seamless and automatic. A stop at a gas station, a walk through the grocery store, or a sit-down at a café could result in a number of incoming and outgoing events.

The choice to spread the information to other potential volunteers is at the discretion of the user. Carthum said that he realized some might embrace the callings for help, others might not. He emphasized that the technology would allow the user to filter out unwanted solicitations.

“The project was rewarding but took hard work,” Carthum said. “Being able to attend the expo was in itself a great experience.”

But he stressed that this kind of collaboration is how the real world works.

“You will have to learn how to collaborate and work with different people,” he said. “That is how business gets done.”

Carthum highly recommended the course not only as a multi-disciplinary experience, but also as a chance to try something unlike any other traditional course TC students might have ever experienced.

“It’s one thing to learn and talk about design and working with designers but another thing to actually take that knowledge and apply it to a concept with designers,” he said. ::

Carthum’s project, dubbed “The Pollenteering Network,” is a new form of interaction designed to get people in the community involved in volunteer activities.

posTComm

UWTC students who write, edit, and design the magazine, gaining invaluable publication experience. Every year a new set of students create the magazine under the guidance of Department Chair Judy Ramey and Assistant-to-the-Chair Kate Long.

For the showcase, STC accepts any entries from the field of TC. Entries are then judged by TC academics and industry professionals. The judges volunteer their time to evaluate entries based on a set of criteria including writing, graphics, copyedits, and organization. Based on the evaluations, an entry can be awarded a Distinguished, Excellence, or Merit Award.

2007 posTComm team members included project manager Rose Rosales, writer and editors Athena Epilepsia, Eliot Yamaguchi, Christine Oon, Jen Becker, Amanda Ahn, Myia Bloomfield, Chad Driesback, Mark Licata, Amy Pletcher, Anthony Shelley, Brandon Ray, layout designer Danielle Schechter, “In the Real World” editor Devor Barton, and advisers Judy Ramey and Kate Long. ::

...continued from previous page
The College of Engineering awarded the Bowen Professorship in Engineering Education in June to UWTC Associate Professor Jennifer Turns for creating teaching strategies that best prepare students for work in the professional realm. The professorship was created in honor of J. Ray Bowen, former dean of the COE. The five-year endowment will provide Prof. Turns with the resources to pursue highly innovative research directions that can then mature into fundable research programs.

“I’m interested in helping students make learning visible,” she said. “I want to help them integrate what they are learning in one class across all of their classes and with their future goals and interests, and to prepare them for professional practice.”

One of Turns’ first efforts toward this end has been to have her students create portfolios of their work as a final class assignment, assuring that they will have more to show for their hard work than just a letter grade. Students have said that their portfolio project was the most valuable class activity they participated in.

The award, which provides three years’ worth of research funding for Turns, will allow her to further explore engineering education methods with real-world applications. She hopes that her research will aid students in “becoming the person they will be in the world beyond.”

Turns will also be recognized for her work on a research paper titled “Engineering Design Processes: A comparison of students and expert practitioners” published in the Fall 2007 issue of Journal of Engineering Education. The paper has received the American Society of Engineering Education’s (ASEE) Wickendon Award for exemplary research papers published within the last year.

The paper presents data from a large-scale research study that compared the design behavior of students and expert engineers. In the study, the researchers asked 20 engineering professionals from a variety of disciplines and industries to design a playground in a laboratory setting and give verbal reports of their thoughts during the design process. The researchers then compared the results of their interviews with a body of data collected by Cynthia Atman, Director of the Center for Engineering Learning and Teaching, and reported in a prior study, in which 50 engineering students were asked to undertake the same task.

The results revealed that the professional engineers spent significantly more time on preparatory tasks and the design project overall than their student counterparts did.

The paper represents “a spectacular contribution to the research on design cognition,” said Turns. “The magnitude and richness of the data are noteworthy. You don’t often get such a large sample size and rich data together.”

Turns, along with co-authors Atman, Susan Mosborg of the College of Education, and a team of researchers from other institutions will be presented the award at the ASEE Annual Conference in June 2008 in Pittsburgh.

Jan Spyridakis has been honored for innovative teaching methods and her contributions to a research paper on the engineering design process.

Jan Spyridakis’ award recognizes her lifelong commitment to education in the TC field.

Jan Spyridakis Receives Ronald S. Blicq Award

Jennifer Turns Awarded Bowen Professorship and Co-Authors Award-Winning Research Paper
Donna Sakson Wins Diamond Award

UWTC Alumna Donna Sakson has long been a friend to the TC department, and this year she received the College of Engineering’s prestigious Diamond Award for Distinguished Service.

Sakson said she was surprised to win the award. “The University has always been important to me so it’s particularly meaningful to be recognized by the College of Engineering,” she said prior to the awards ceremony Friday, May 30, at the Deca Hotel in Seattle. “I’m often struck by how many volunteers it takes to put on a single event or even to keep an organization going.”

The Diamond Award is given to alumni who have made notable contributions to their community. Sakson was honored for launching TC’s diversity scholarship for undergraduate students. The first scholarship was awarded in autumn of 2007 to students Rick Price and Brooke Sattler. This scholarship will help the TC department recruit and retain students from underrepresented minorities and ultimately increase diversity in the TC workforce.

Shortly after earning a BS from the University of Washington, Donna Sakson started Sakson & Taylor as a small business out of her apartment. Her goal was to provide her community with the best software documentation possible. Over the next 20 years, the company grew to be the largest technical communication staffing agency in the country. Sakson & Taylor specializes in a user-centered approach to web site design, maintenance, and production. The company pairs skilled consultants with clients in need of assistance in the realm of technical communication design, information architecture, and more. Although Sakson & Taylor was acquired by Aquent in 2006, Sakson still remains a strong presence in the TC community and she finds time for fulfilling volunteer work.

Sakson has demonstrated leadership on many levels; as an undergraduate, she was president of the UW student chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). In 1996, she was named president of STC in their international office.

Sakson is an active volunteer for Bike Works, an organization that teaches youth bicycle maintenance and safety while encouraging people to use bicycles as a healthy and environmentally-friendly mode of transportation. Bike Works also allows children to earn free bicycles by taking bike repair classes. When asked what she felt was at the heart of distinguished service, Sakson replied “It’s about finding a unique way to make the world a better place.”

Sakson said that learning to prioritize where she gives her energy has been invaluable to her success. “Business is quite forgiving,” she said. “You can make lots of mistakes and still the business will survive. When you think about what really determines the outcome for a business…it’s not always the things we worry about most. The most important thing is to make sure that the first decision is the right one for you.”::

MSTC Student Ramsey Tesdell wins INSER IC Scholarship

Ramsey Tesdell, a first-year graduate student in both Middle East Studies and Technical Communication, won the INSER IC (Institute for National Security Education and Research, Intelligence Community) Scholarship. The scholarship covers expenses related to a cultural-immersion experience during the summer. Funded through the INSER program in the iSchool, it includes Arabic-language study at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan.

Tesdell said he wants to conduct research on whether technology is playing a role in social change in Jordan and the wider Middle East. He hopes this research will be a section of his thesis.

Tesdell grew up in Iowa and earned his bachelor’s degree in Technical Communication from Iowa State University. He then spent a year in Jordan as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar and co-founded a citizen-journalism website while abroad called 7iber (pronounced he-bar), the first such site in the Middle East.

“My prior experience in the Middle East and the strategic importance of helping Americans understand the Arab world better were pivotal in helping me get the scholarship,” he said.

Professor Mark Haselkorn has been his mentor. “Tesdell has impressed the people at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence,” Haselkorn said. “His rhetorical perspective as a TC student brings variety in any field he works for.”::
Scholarship Recipient Balances Family and Studies Successfully

Rick Price's résumé should list "expert time management skills" under his summary of qualifications when he's applying for jobs after graduation. The senior not only commutes three hours a day from Lacey and takes a full course load to launch him into the field of technical writing, but also plays the roles of both husband and father as well. Thanks to scholarships for engineering students, however, the senior will not have to worry about paying back loans once he receives his bachelor's degree in June.

Price won academia's version of the Triple Crown. He took home the Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics scholarship, the Sakson & Taylor Diversity scholarship, and the Walter L. Cook scholarship.

He credited his essays as the distinguishing factor that "gave him an edge" over other candidates. "I attempted to explain myself clearly and include details about my life that gave the judges a glimpse of what it's like to be me," he said.

With his school financed for the year, he still had a hard year ahead. With two-year-old son Brenden and wife Tanya at home, Price said he has to manage his time "tenaciously," sometimes only seeing his family for about 30 minutes each day before he leaves for school. Though he has managed his hectic schedule successfully, he said he would recommend students attend college directly out of high school.

Price didn't attend college immediately because he enlisted in the Army. After two deployments, one to Iraq and one to Bosnia, during his three years on active duty and five years in the National Guard, he began attending Centralia Community College. Though he had been accepted into colleges closer to home, including St. Martin's and Pacific Lutheran University, he said he was drawn to the UW because of its solid academic reputation and name recognition.

He originally started studying Informatics, but he said it dealt too much with programming. His interests in writing and editing led him to browse through what TC had to offer.

After taking Style in Scientific and Technical Writing and Introduction to Communication Design, he was hooked. He said the courses honed his writing skills and taught him to design deliverables using several types of software at a fast pace, giving him "good practice for the real world."

The switch to TC was a rewarding one. He said the TC department is more like a family where "everyone knows your name and wants you to be successful, helping you make connections and network with potential employees."

He hopes to put these connections to work as he joins the working world. Price is seeking a work for a large company such as Boeing or Microsoft as a technical writer.

But before he starts work, he will enjoy some rest on a family trip to Hawaii. It will be the first time in two years that he won't have to worry about homework during his free time. ::

Looking for Scholarships?

TC students have been rewarded for their hard work and commitment to academics with a number of scholarships. If you are thinking of going back to school or know someone who is, be sure to check out these great scholarship opportunities available to UWTC students:

**The Husky Promise:** To ensure the UW remains affordable the Husky Promise guarantees that full tuition will be covered by grant or scholarship support for Washington residents who are low- or lower middle-income. These grants and scholarships do not have to be repaid. http://www.washington.edu/huskypromise/

**STC Puget Sound Chapter Souther and White Scholarship Program:** The Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication offers two scholarships annually, each in the amount of $1,500, to help the recipients further their education in the field of technical communication. James W. Souther and Myron L. White were instrumental in establishing the Puget Sound Chapter of STC. They established undergraduate and graduate programs in Scientific and Technical Communication at the University of Washington. http://stc-psc.org

by Maggie Bardacke

by Amy Monroe
MSTC Student Amy Monroe Wins Air Force Spouse Award and Grant

MSTC student Amy Monroe won both the McChord Officers’ Spouses’ Club scholarship and General Henry H. Arnold Education Grant for the second consecutive year. The programs were established to reward the academic achievement of spouses of Air Force personnel for their involvement in continuing education and community activities.

Monroe said the award money was a blessing that paid for nearly her entire first year of school. Monroe said the scholarship was particularly helpful since she prefers not to work while in school so she can focus on her schoolwork and stay home with her three-year-old son. She credited both her volunteer work in the Air Force community and extensive involvement in AmeriCorps as a reading tutor for helping win the awards.

She hopes to repay the organizations when she finishes her degree by volunteering to do UCD-based web design for various base organizations when her husband gets reassigned.

She said balancing schoolwork with parenthood is her biggest challenge. Both she and her husband are in graduate school.

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BSTC Student Wins UW Libraries Scholarship

Senior Shalina Bajracharya was one of ten students selected by the Staff Development Advisory Committee to receive the 2008 UW Libraries Student Employee Scholarship.

Bajracharya prize-winning essay describes her interaction with the UW library facilities and services as both a student and an employee.

During the 2007-2008 academic year she worked in the Microforms and Newspapers Collections in the Suzzallo Library under the supervision of Terry Kato. She received her $1,000 scholarships at the Student Employee Scholarship reception held on May 6 in the Walker-Ames Room in Kane Hall.

The Student Employee Scholarship Program is supported by generous donors and is administered by Libraries Organization Development and Training and the Libraries Development Office.

Bajracharya served as a 2008 postComm team member, both as a photographer and writer.

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Scholarships

Sakson Diversity Scholarship: Donna Sakson, former President of Sakson & Taylor, Inc. and a UWTC grad, along with her husband, Jonathan Mark, donated $100,000 to establish a scholarship fund to bring more underrepresented minority students into the UWTC program and thus into the profession.

http://www.uwtc.washington.edu/nav_intl_diversity/diversity


Undergraduates can find more information through the Undergraduate Scholarship Office:
http://www.washington.edu/students/ugrad/scholar/

A resource for Graduate student scholarships is the UW Library’s Grants & Funding Information Service:
http://www.lib.washington.edu/gfis/

Be sure to check out the new TC Blog for updated and late-breaking information about scholarships, job opportunities and the latest department news!
http://depts.washington.edu/tc/wordpress/
This August, PhD graduate Quan Zhou will be the first UWTC doctoral student to start a career in academia. Zhou enjoys interacting and mentoring students and has been preparing for the job-hunting process for more than a year. The process was long and strenuous: it required multiple interviews, teaching demos, professional recommendations, and a polished portfolio of research and teaching qualifications.

But at the end of last year, Zhou accepted a position as an Assistant Professor of Technical Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Zhou’s history in TC began a number of years ago as an undergraduate at Wuhan University in China. Zhou studied editing and publishing and minored in journalism. He decided to pursue TC because it was not solely technology-focused but rather a “bridge between communication and technology.” For his graduate studies, Zhou was attracted to UWTC for two reasons; it is located in the U.S., where TC is the most developed, and UWTC, as part of the College of Engineering, included usability along with traditional rhetoric. Also, Zhou has enjoyed adapting to a new cultural experience.

Throughout his time at the UW, Zhou’s interest has mainly focused on information design. His dissertation work focused on QuikScan, a set of formatting techniques designed to improve the comprehension, retention, and scanability of documents.

Zhou had advice for fellow TC students. “Don’t narrow yourself to a category in TC,” he suggested to prospective professionals and academics. “It is a young field and continues to change.” In addition to information design, Zhou’s other research interests include international TC, usability, user research, and information communication technologies.

During his PhD work, Zhou has worked closely with his dissertation committee, which was headed by UWTC Professor David Farkas. Other committee members included UWTC Associate Professor Jennifer Turms; UWTC Professor Emeritus Mary Coney; and Communication Professor Gerry Philipsen. ::

**“Don’t narrow yourself to a category in TC ...
It is a young field and continues to change”**

-Quan Zhou

advice for prospective students and faculty

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**UWTC Lucky to Have Talented Adjuncts and Affiliates**

UWTC is privileged to have enthusiastic and talented faculty members of the UW and the wider community as adjunct and affiliate faculty. These members add depth and breadth to our teaching, our research, and our community. They also give students real-world experience that gives them the boost they need to ace interviews, impress co-workers, or land jobs.

UWTC appoints adjunct and affiliate professors annually. The title of ‘adjunct professor’ is bestowed on a professor from another department who has a strong connection with the faculty and students of an associated department.

**Adjunct Professors:**

- **Prof. Cynthia Atman:** Industrial Engineering Department; Director, Center for Engineering Learning & Teaching (CELT). Research partner and supporter.
- **Prof. Leah M. Ceccarelli:** Communication Department; Rhetoric of science, rhetorical criticism. Has worked with and supported many UWTC students.
- **Prof. Thomas A. Furness:** Industrial Engineering; Creator and teacher of TC455, a cross-listed course in user-interface design, supporter of our students, and friend of the department.

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By Kate Long
Many TC students have on-campus jobs while in school. It is common for TC students to seek out part-time jobs at the library or The Daily, and some students work in Graduate-Staff Assistantships, Teaching Assistantships, and Research Assistantships. For these students, enrolling in a scholarly program at the UW led them to their jobs on campus.

However, there is another type of student on campus: full-time employees of the UW who enter an academic program when they already working. This year, UWTC welcomed Melinda McRae and Mark Stewart, two new master’s students who enrolled in the program after years of working at the UW in professional staff positions.

McRae chose the MSTC program because she saw that it involved both writing and technology, two areas that are applied in her current position as a Web Information Specialist for the Technology Innovations in Education and Research (TIER) group in the UW School of Nursing. Her job responsibilities range from developing and conducting software trainings for faculty and staff to helping redesign and manage the Schools of Nursing's website.

McRae's MSTC courses complement her job responsibilities well. McRae said skills learned in TC518, User-Centered Design, will be useful for the redesign of the School of Nursing's website.

Stewart is the Online Services Specialist at the UW Alumni Association. He is on a team that manages the organization's website and many ancillary sites. He works with graphic designers, writers, and event planners to create websites and event registration systems for Alumni events.

He started working at the UW with the intent to pursue graduate-level coursework. Like McRae, he was intrigued by TC518. “Working with the tech industry, I saw how often projects that had potential to be really amazing were derailed because they weren't designed in a way that was useful and meaningful to their intended audience,” he said.

Stewart also emphasized the importance of usability. “There's certainly a need at the university, as well as other higher-education institutions and non-profits, for web designers and developers who have a strong background in usability and information systems—organizations may not have the budget to have a user-research department, but they understand the importance of that skill set,” he said.

Balancing work and school challenged both McRae and Stewart. Transitioning mentally from workplace to classroom, learning to manage time, and keeping realistic expectations were issues that plagued both of them.

Ultimately, both said the opportunity to take courses with a curriculum that is directly applicable to their work responsibilities justifies all the hard work. Their work could help spread technical communication's core theories and practices throughout campus and make a positive impact on multiple UW websites. ::

‘Affiliates’ are generally members of the wider community who also have a strong connection with TC, but are not full-time faculty members.

Affiliate Professors:

• **Suzanne Boyd:** Principal Consultant at Anthro-Tech, Inc. Creator and teacher of TC537, User-Centered Web Design.

• **Tracey Freed:** Principal Consultant, Pen to Paper (writing and content management services). Has taught extensively for us in the undergraduate and certificate technical communication programs.

• **Dr. Carolyn Plumb:** Director of Education, Innovation and Strategic Projects at Montana State U. Directed our Engineering Communication Program for many years and continues to be a great friend of the department.

• **Kent Sullivan:** Senior User Experience Knowledge Engineer, Microsoft Corporation. Developed a section of TC521, our speaker series, focused on the user experience, and supports the department in numerous other ways.

• **Dr. Karen Kurt Teal:** Has taught extensively for us and supports the department in numerous other ways.

Thank you to our affiliates and adjunct faculty! ::
UWTC Creates Diversity Board

In an effort to increase diversity among UWTC students, staff, and faculty, several concerned members of the TC community have joined together to form the Technical Communication Diversity Board (TCDB). The Board’s goal is to provide a supportive environment for students, faculty, and staff from under-represented backgrounds. The Board recognizes that in order for the Department to remain at the forefront of research, it must cultivate a safe learning environment for diverse students. Central to TC research, theory, and practice is the acknowledgement of the many different people who use and communicate with technology. In order to accurately represent the user experience, the UWTC department must embody the diversity found in the outside world.

“It’s not just related to ethnic diversity,” said Gian Bruno, who moderates the Diversity Board e-mail list. The Diversity Board is taking strides to represent people from all backgrounds in terms of disabilities, age, socio-economic status, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, to name a few categories.

“When you’re admitted to the university, the university has made a promise that we believe that you will be successful. When we admit [diverse students] we make that same promise, but how are we following through on that promise? Are we giving them the tools to be successful?” said Bruno.

The Board experienced a monumental success during the 2007-2008 academic year with the first annual disbursement of the Sakson Diversity Scholarship to undergrad TC students Brook Sattler and Rick Price. This is the first scholarship endowment that the TC department has received, and the fact that the scholarship is focused on enhancing diversity shows great promise for the Board. The Diversity Board meets semi-annually to discuss ideas about how to recruit and retain a diverse student body. Next year, they hope to hold meetings quarterly. The TCDB will advise and assist the department as it strives to maintain a welcoming environment for students from under-represented backgrounds, while also providing financial support and mentorships. ::

Beth Kolko Investigates Social Technologies at Microsoft Research

Associate Professor Beth Kolko spent three months at Microsoft Research (MSR) as a visiting faculty researcher in Spring 2007. She worked on projects that explored how different social groups used cell phone-based social software and short message service (SMS).

The number of people using social technologies, such as social networking software and SMS, is booming. But who exactly uses these technologies and for what purposes? Discovering the answers to these questions will help MSR guide the development of technologies that foster and facilitate social coordination.

Kolko’s research experience includes exploring how information and communication technologies (ICTs) are used in the developing world. In particular, she has observed how people use SMS to facilitate social interactions and information distribution.

As a visiting faculty researcher, she worked primarily with MSR staff in the Community Technologies (CT) group, but she also worked with Microsoft Games Studio User Research group and other visiting researchers to craft research agendas. She spent the majority of her time working with MSR researcher Scott Counts and the CT group on an SMS project. They investigated how social groups—differentiated by age, technological savvy, and occupation—used an SMS-only interface of SLAM, a social networking software prototype for Windows’ mobile-powered cell phones. This interface supports group-based messaging for coordinating people and chatting.

Preliminary results from their research pointed to some surprising findings. For example, the researchers discovered that college-age students—the targeted demographic for most social networking software—were typically less inclined to use the SMS-only interface than other demographics because of their close physical proximity to their friends on campus. These preliminary findings demonstrate how the work of social technology researchers like Kolko can inform the development of more useful and successful software applications. ::
Mark Zachry Assumes Directorship of LUTE

Prof. Mark Zachry will take over as director of the UWTC Laboratory for Usability Testing and Evaluation (LUTE) for the academic year 2008-09 during outgoing Chair Judy Ramey’s yearlong sabbatical.

“Mark brings a wealth of knowledge about usability and user-centered design to LUTE,” Ramey said. “In addition to having built a usability lab at his previous institution, Mark has also taught our whole range of human-computer-interaction courses and has been very active in the UW-wide HCI [Human-Computer Interaction] Initiative.”

Zachry takes over at a critical time for LUTE; during his directorship, LUTE will be relocated to TC’s new home in Sieg Hall. He has already contributed many wonderful ideas about how to improve the technology, layout, and functionality of the lab in its new setting, Ramey added.

One of Mark’s goals is to exploit the new, central location of LUTE to greatly expand student awareness and use of the lab. He will also be exploring strategic partnerships with industry, with an emphasis on projects that give students hands-on experience.

Assuming the LUTE directorship coincides with several major transitions in Mark’s professional life. During the summer 2008, he will travel to China to complete a research contract funded by Microsoft related to training in international software engineering. Also, as of the end of summer, he will reach the end of his term as editor of Technical Communication Quarterly, the archival journal of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW).

This year, TCQ received two national awards from the National Council of Teachers of English in April for best research in technical communication. And he will have completed two major (and extraordinarily successful) service activities for the department; he was a member of the search committee for the new chair of TC, and he led the search committee that successfully hired three new faculty members for the department this year.

“Mark’s service this past year has been phenomenal,” Ramey said. “Both the discipline and the department owe him a huge debt of gratitude.”

New Hires

...continued from page 3

even more challenging. Understanding and theorizing work processes, tools, and organizations are at the heart of my research agenda. I use qualitative research methods, including ethnographic ones, to understand how people design collaboratively.”

When she arrives in January, she will teach a graduate course on qualitative research methods, which will focus on the practicalities of conducting ethnographic research including how to enter a research site, conduct participant-observation, interview, transcribe, and methodically code and analyze data. Students will conduct a small ethnographic study over the course of the quarter.

One of her favorite books when she was young was Richard Scarry’s What Do People Do All Day? “I’m still trying to answer that question,” Lee joked.

Julie Kientz

Kientz has a doctorate in computer science from the College of Computing and GVU Center at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Her HCI interests focus particularly on determining how novel computing applications can address important social issues and on evaluating those applications through long-term real world deployment studies using a balance of qualitative and quantitative methods. Her most recent research involves the design and evaluation of computing technologies to support decision-making for teams of caregivers, including caregivers providing therapy for children with autism and parents tracking the developmental progress and health of their newborn children.

Already in her research, she has succeeded in defining a method for the embedding of computing technologies into existing work and life practices to enable better data collection and provide more opportunities for data review. She looks forward to continuing and expanding on these projects when she joins TC and the I-School. Kientz’s teaching will focus on HCI courses, many cross-listed between TC and the I-School, that will help build up the UW-wide HCI initiative.

“In addition to being first-class scholars, these three new faculty are personable, pleasant and student-centered people,” outgoing UWTC Chair Judy Ramey says. “Their poised, relaxed manner during their public lectures made it clear that they will fit in extremely well with the TC students and the faculty. We welcome them to our community!”

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:: Photo Courtesy of UWTC ::

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Internship in Kyrgyzstan Tests TC Skills

A chain of events set PhD candidate Rebecca Walton on the path toward a career in systems design for international aid agencies. As a student in Professor Mark Haselkorn’s Technical Communication Systems class, the management and design of large systems intrigued her. The class used Mercy Corps, an international humanitarian aid organization, as a study model. To apply her knowledge, she embarked on a three-month summer internship with Mercy Corps to the central Asian nation of Kyrgyzstan. The Borman Family Foundation funded the trip.

In Kyrgyzstan, Walton assisted Mercy Corps’ Information Technology (IT) team in the design of a new management information system (MIS) for Kompanion, a microfinance organization that serves over 31,000 clients around the Kyrgyz Republic. Kompanion’s administrative hub, located in the capital city of Bishkek, lacked access to the loan and client data gathered in their regional offices. Walton’s team was tasked with designing a new system to compile, share, and store data in an electronic database. Although she was based in Bishkek, Walton’s work took her around the country to interview branch managers and loan officers about their practices and on-the-job needs. The interviews helped her form a picture of how the officers gathered data: largely in the field and entirely by hand. Detailed loan and background information was recorded on paper at the client homes and businesses. As Walton explained to one group how data would now be input on computers back at the office, an exasperated woman exclaimed: “Wait a minute! I do over 80% of my work outside the office! If… I have to do all this (data entry) at the office, my job will take twice as long, and I will only be able to serve half as many people!”

Suddenly, it was clear to Walton that the officers needed a device with greater mobility. Back in the capital, she was able to build consensus to include personal digital assistants in the design. “It made me feel good, because they might have ended up with a system that would have halved their productivity…[and that] would have been a shame,” Walton said.

Looking back, she emphasized how her experience with the outspoken loan officer supports the theories she learned in UWTC classes. “You need to balance the perspectives of multiple stakeholders,” she said. “It shows how truly important it is to get people at all levels to buy in, and how easy it is not to.”

While Mercy Corps often provided her with a translator at work, Walton relied on fellow interns, co-workers, and the generosity of her hosts to bridge the language barrier. “They loved to see me order food because they had taught me how to say (a phrase), and they were so proud when I used what I had learned,” she said. She learned the Cyrillic alphabet and built a basic vocabulary in Russian. She said one of her proudest moments was mailing a “marshrootka” (a small public bus) and going to the market by herself.

Today Walton looks forward to a career in MIS design for international non-profits and humanitarian agencies. “I want to help these organizations do what they do, better,” she says, adding “I feel so completely blessed to be in this program.”

Rebecca Walton will co-edit an upcoming issue of the IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication journal with Haselkorn, who is now her adviser. The special December 2009 issue will feature a focus on Humanitarian Information Systems, a topic she finds “absolutely fascinating!” ::

tips from Rebecca Walton

Interested in Working Abroad?

To find an internship, Walton recommends looking for businesses and organizations that have an established relationship with the UW or a faculty member. As with job hunting, “It really helps to have someone recommend you,” she said. Volunteer work might also open the door to a more formal internship experience.

Can a student who speaks only English pursue an internship abroad? “Absolutely!”

But if you don’t know the language in your host country, Walton offers these survival tips:

• Learn a few words: a traditional greeting and “thank-you” are particularly useful.
• Learn the alphabet—“crucial for understanding signs and getting around.”
• Bring an assortment of small gifts for your hosts and employers. ::
by Boudewijn Rombouts

Twente Exchange Student Reflects on Time at the UW

Studying abroad in Seattle fulfilled a life-long dream for Dutch student Boudewijn Rombouts. He said his journey to Seattle was like traveling down the Yellow Brick Road of *The Wizard of Oz*.

::Photo Courtesy of Boudewijn Rombouts:

Ever since one of the kids in my neighborhood went to visit Seattle while his father was there on a business trip, I have been captivated by Seattle. Its landmark, the Space Needle, was ingrained in my mind. I had always thought that I would one day visit the city on a holiday, but I never dreamed that I would actually get to live there for a year.

I had been looking to go abroad for a while, and was initially focusing on Sydney; however, no exchange seemed possible between the University of Twente and Sydney. When my adviser mentioned the exchange program between our department and the Technical Communication department at the UW, I literally jumped at the opportunity. From the moment I got in touch with the TC staff, especially Kyle Sullivan and Gian Bruno, I had a good feeling about the exchange.

Everyone was incredibly helpful and excited about my upcoming visit to the department. I am happy to say that my experiences—from getting warm welcome from the people at the Foundation for International Understanding Through Students (FIUTS) who introduced me to the university and the city, to meeting great professors such as David Farkas and Mark Zachry—have been nothing short of wonderful.

From my own work experience as a facilitator for international students at the University of Twente, I was expecting to go through a few tough months when I first came here. It generally takes people a while to become comfortable and familiar in dealing with their new surroundings and a new culture, but I have yet to go through those tough times. I have grown to love Seattle and all its quirks—the “Emerald City” from the Wizard of Oz, the home of the Utilikilt, a city built on top of its own ruins. I cannot imagine how much I will miss Seattle when I have to go back to the Netherlands. ::

by Ben Leinweber and Alex Turner

Technical Japanese Students Reflect on Internships

My undergrad engineering background is in computer architecture, but I fell in love with the Japanese language and people after studying and working in Japan. I decided to enter the UWTC Technical Japanese Program (TJP) in hopes of being able to continue my career in the high tech industry while utilizing my Japanese abilities. I liked TJP’s concentration on business-style Japanese and the associated internship program with Japanese companies.

I chose to apply to Fukui Byora, a company that specializes in making metal parts less than 2mm in diameter for devices like mechanical pencils and the Nintendo DS. Fukui Byora had positions open for electrical engineers and computer scientists, which fit perfectly with my background. A report I read online said all of the interns there reported that everyone is very understanding and helpful in easing them into the Japanese language.

Because of my previous work experience in Japan, Fukui Byora decided to offer me a position as internship-team lead, despite my mistakes in formal Japanese.

I am looking forward to my year-long internship, which will start in June 2008. This experience will help my career goals of utilizing both my engineering and Japanese talents. ::

The Technical Japanese program has helped with all aspects of my internship, but especially with translation. Teachers spend a great deal of time focusing on the Japanese sentence structure and specific steps necessary for good translation, which has been extremely useful.

I imagined the contrast between the American and Japanese cultures would allow me to see the world from a unique perspective. I had hoped that Japan’s tradition-laden culture would teach me to value things hidden beneath the transitional waves of American culture. And while I have gained a new perspective as a consequence of my internship in Japan, it is more a result of the similarities between the two countries than the differences. It has been through these similarities that I have been able to communicate and share with my Japanese coworkers and friends. Through these similarities I have found comfort away from my home, family, and friends. So while it may be the differences that generate screenplays and stereotypes, it is rather the similarities between the two countries that should be celebrated and embraced. ::

by Ben Leinweber and Alex Turner

Alex Turner, a TJP student, translated written documents for a Japanese company that develops support software for pharmaceutical trials.

::Photo Courtesy of Alex Turner:

Ben Leinweber, a first-year master’s student in the Technical Japanese Program was recently selected for an internship at the Japanese company Fukui Byora.

::Photo Courtesy of Ben Leinweber:
Beginning January 2008, Professor Mark Haselkorn assumed the directorship of the Pacific Rim Visual Analytics Center (PARVAC) located here at the UW. Created in January 2006, PARVAC is one of five regional visual analytics centers (RVACs) that operate under the National Visualization and Analytics Center (NVAC).

Broadly speaking, visual analytics is the science of performing analyses with the aid of visualizations. The visual analytics centers aim to apply visual analytics (VA) so that decision makers can easily analyze information to make the most informed decisions. Imagine trying to read through, line-by-line, millions of pages of information in order to make a critical decision. By helping users visualize patterns and trends in data to support analyses, VA facilitates the decision-making process by eliminating the need to sift through countless lines of data.

Because the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) funds all the VACs, one goal of the visual analytics centers is to provide VA technology and tools for security systems. The VACs have also proven helpful in disaster relief efforts by facilitating emergency response. During natural and man-made disasters, the PARVAC research projects have focused on facilitating the collaborative decision-making process to help make response times more rapid and accurate. When lives are at stake, a triage system needs to be established because of the limited resources. The VA helps balance these resources in times of crisis by generating visible patterns that help authorities make the best possible decision.

PARVAC also uses a software-simulation project called RimSim, which uses a map of Seattle to facilitate the city’s emergency-response system. The simulation program shows the location of buildings, traffic lights and trees as well as emergency aids such as fire hydrants to help give a bird’s-eye view of an area to avoid unforeseen obstacles. In addition to the map, RimSim also visualizes communication activity between key decision makers over a period of time. Bruce Campbell and Suzanne Weghorst are helping develop the simulation to more accurately represent emergency scenarios. For example, the simulation can color buildings blue and show water depth to simulate flooding. By using existing data sets to simulate scenarios, RimSim can help first responders gain valuable experience in handling threats, such as earthquakes or volcanoes.

Haselkorn is the founding chair of the Department of Technical Communication at the UW, and in addition to PARVAC, Haselkorn founded and directs the UW’s Interdisciplinary Program in Humanitarian Relief. He teaches TC 520 Communication Systems and is the current President of the IEEE Professional Communication Society.

Engineers Without Borders Seeks TC Involvement

Like any fledgling organization, the University of Washington’s student-run chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB) has experienced its fair share of recruiting woes. Though the group’s student population within the engineering community continues to increase, the organization is working to expand its membership to grow and better fulfill its mission. Technical Communication students are particularly needed to help promote and support EWB’s efforts to alleviate suffering in developing nations through sustainable engineering projects.

EWB began as a single project of a University of Colorado civil engineering professor who helped install a water-delivery system for villagers in rural Belize in 2001. The organization’s mission is to “build a better world, one community at a time” by implementing sustainable changes that can “interrupt the cycle of poverty.” In the short time since its inception, the program has grown to more than 250 student-run and professional chapters in the United States alone.

UW’s chapter began in 2005 with a handful of engineering students wanting to make a difference in the developing world. It has since blossomed into a thriving club of members from different academic departments working on projects in around the world, particularly in Latin America. Their current project is in Bolivia, where the group has installed...
When her 12-month sabbatical began in the autumn of 2007, Associate Prof. Beth Kolko decided not to set a plan or agenda for how to spend her year. However, her time-off quickly morphed into an ongoing series of trips that frequently took her to the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School and across the globe in pursuit of her passion: melding academic inquiry with the work of alternative research communities and creative user-generated innovation, otherwise known as “hacks.”

Kolko is interested in how hacking—the adaptation of existing technologies in novel ways to better meet a user’s specific needs—was used in emerging markets in Central Asia. Informed by her ongoing research on user-centered design and information and communication technologies (ICT), she began directing several research groups within the TC department.

One group investigated how ICTs are adapted to meet the local needs of individuals living in countries with emerging technology markets, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Another group, Design for Digital Inclusion looks broadly at issues of technology use in resource-constrained environments. She observed first-hand how online gamers in Central Asian internet cafes, where LANs and Internet servers only allowed for local connections, hacked online games so that they could participate with gamers across the world. She also traveled to Liberia and Kenya to learn more about uses of ICTs in these post-conflict environments.

Kolko has most recently been studying the global and political effects of hacking, as well as how user-generated innovation can impact the design of technologies: “I’ve always wanted to bridge together these two different worlds of activism and academia to foster collaboration between the two for developing creative and innovative technologies.”

She soon received an opportunity to do so. The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School awarded her a fellowship for her work. She found herself joining the ranks of other fellows and Berkman faculty alumni such as Jimmy Wales and Lawrence Lessing.

Flying between Seattle and Cambridge regularly, Kolko began presenting lectures, collaborating with fellows on projects, and traveling to further explore how the world of hackers and “hacktivism” overlaps with academic research on computer-supported co-operative work, user-centered design, and other TC-related topics.

She recently presented “User, Hacker, Builder, Thief: Creativity and Consumerism in a Digital Age” as part of the Berkman Luncheon Series, in which she discussed the negative stereotype of hacking and emphasized that hackers can bring about positive technological advancements. She also plans to do a series of podcasts on related topics later this summer.

Kolko’s Fellowship at the Berkman Center has also afforded her opportunities for travel during her sabbatical year. She recently attended a conference, “Digitally-Empowered Activists: Getting the Tools to the People Who Need Them,” in Istanbul, Turkey, which was held in association with the Internet and Democracy Project based at the Berkman Center.

She is also collaborating with other Fellows on several projects, one of which took her to Kenya to document how ICTs were being used by individuals living in a conflict zone.

She examined how mobile phones and SMS were used by people in Kenya during post-election violence. At the start of 2008, after a contested election sparked violent protests, the Kenyan government limited television and other mainstream media, so mobile phones became a primary way for information (and disinformation) to spread. Kolko traveled to Kenya with Berkman colleague Michael Best to learn more about the role of these emerging technologies in such a turbulent social landscape.

“There are infinite possibilities when you have no schedule to adhere to,” Kolko said. “If a trip to Liberia and Kenya comes up to study how digital media contributes to conflict, you can go.”

**Bridging Together Two Worlds: Beth Kolko’s Sabbatical Activities**


*Photos Courtesy of Beth Kolko*
Interview With Jan Spyridakis

In August 2008, Professor Jan Spyridakis will assume leadership of the UWTC program when she becomes chair. *posTComm* met with her to discuss her plans for the department.

How do you feel about your selection as the new head of the department?

It’s an exciting opportunity! It’s a great time and place to build on all of the programs that [Outgoing Chair and Professor] Judy Ramey helped us develop, to continue activities she has started, which include most recently her work with an HCI (human-computer interaction) interdisciplinary group involving faculty from other departments.

[This initiative] builds on what the DUB (Design Use Build) group and many departments are already doing—and it is trying to coordinate a larger effort. Judy and [Professor] Mark Zachry have been most involved in the planning stages for this initiative, and it is something I will clearly learn a lot more about when I become Chair. It’s going to be intriguing to build on what we’ve got going while making sure that we are staying in tune with the TC field.

So, that ties into another question: what do you feel has been the state of both our department and the field of technical communication as a whole over the last decade?

I would say user-centered design (UCD) and user testing have really come to the forefront. They were always lurking, under lots of different kinds of words and headings like “document analysis” and “audience evaluation,” but I think that the recognition of UCD is one of the forefront efforts led by technical communication programs, and specifically our program—we’re unmatched on that.

And what do you think it is that sets our TC department apart from other TC departments, in terms of our adoption of UCD and usability testing?

I think it’s our strength, in having design professionals and methods professionals that brings a nice marriage of design driven by assessment. And whether it’s usability assessment or empirical assessment, our strength in UCD is driven by research on users. So I think we have certainly been a leader in the discipline in terms of UCD and methods-based approaches.

Looking back, what do you feel will be Judy’s legacy for this department?

Growth! Growth and expansion—particularly programmatic expansion. We’ve gained an evening Master’s Program, the PhD Program, the UCD Certificate, etc.—and also inroads into funding agencies. And, of course, if you really want to know Judy’s personal legacy, it would be in terms of usability methodology—she’s extremely well recognized for that. >>
“Nothing’s set in stone around here, and that keeps you on your toes.”
-Jan Spyridakis

What are some of your hopes, your dreams, your aspirations for your tenure as Chair?

I think we need come up with a strategic plan for the next 10 years, and I’d like that to be faculty driven. We’re going to have some new faculty in the next three years—at least three new faculty members. So along with [professors] Beth Kolko, Jennifer Turns and Mark Zachry, that’s six new faculty within six or seven years. I think we need to have these people seriously involved in defining our strategic directions. And we’re also going to have faculty retiring in the next ten years, so I think there’s going to be a lot of change. I want to help herald this change into effective actions that the faculty and students are comfortable with.

And the discipline itself is expanding because it’s trying to cover an online world as well as a print-based world—a realm which UWTC addresses at the undergrad level in the study and practice of report writing and proposal writing, things like that. So it’s not like the discipline has shifted, it’s just getting bigger and bigger… It will be an exciting challenge to simultaneously maintain the foundations of technical communication and grow with the field.

In terms of our department, it wouldn’t surprise me if we got more into research around online education, social media and technology, etc. But our research directions are very much driven by the faculty we hire, and with two to three new faculty hires within the next five years, our position with regard to HCI research will certainly expand.

That’s exciting!

Yes, it is! The research that our faculty conducts helps our curriculum evolve to keep up with the times. Nothing’s set in stone around here and that keeps you on your toes. [laughs]

Briefly, on to some more practical concerns: the department’s move [to Sieg Hall]—how do you feel about that?

Oh, exciting! Fantastic! You know, the synergy of having our students, our faculty, and our staff in one co-located space will be amazing. Plus, it’s even more centrally located on the campus. It’s going to be great, and it’s really quite a nice space.

And how did this come about, that we got this space? Have we been petitioning for a long time?

We’ve been petitioning for a long time, and I don’t know how this space happened to come up; I know that Judy has been rattling a lot of cages about the necessity of being co-located, not only for collaboration among our faculty, but for our students to know what people are doing. Why now? Why not before? I don’t know, but we’ve been asking for years.

I’ve already asked what you’re looking forward to most about becoming chair. Is there anything you’re looking forward to ‘least’ about becoming Chair?

Hmm, I don’t know yet. Too much email? ::laughs:: That’s probably one of my biggest fears, since I’m already failing miserably with my email. More email, more typos…I don’t know. We have a very congenial faculty, so I don’t anticipate negative stuff. We seem like a pretty ‘blissfully happy’ group! We are very lucky for that.

Well, congratulations and good luck!

Come back and interview me next year, and maybe I’ll have more answers for you! ::
Meandering as slowly as possible from Paris to the Pyrenees may sound as tortuous to some as reading a vacuum-cleaner manual. But Professor Judy Ramey eagerly anticipates trudging through Europe. Her yearlong sabbatical will be a time to reflect after years of heavy administrative duties as chair of the Department of Technical Communication. Ramey leaves the post at the end of this academic year.

The 1,000-mile journey might feel like a mere stroll when compared to the task of creating the department’s doctoral program, which Ramey said was the most harrowing yet equally rewarding feat accomplished during her 11-year tenure as chair.

Ramey began teaching computer documentation and project management at UW in what was then the program in scientific and technical communication. At the time, Microsoft occupied only a handful of offices in a small building behind a Burger Master in Bellevue, where the company was developing some of the earliest personal-computer software.

Since then, Ramey said UWTC and the high-tech world have been symbiotic, influencing one another as they continue to grow. In the 25 years since she started teaching, the program has flourished into a department with an undergraduate program, day and evening master’s degrees, a certificate in user-centered design, and now a doctoral program.

The doctoral program took three frustrating attempts and more than six years to create. When Ramey pushed for the doctoral program soon after taking over duties as chair from professor Mark Haselkorn, the graduate school rejected her first direct appeal. A second attempt to align the program with one in the School of Communications also failed.

But Ramey wouldn’t let these barriers hold her back for long because “the potential was so huge.” UWTC Professor David Farkas said it was her “dogged persistence” that finally allowed her to succeed.

Her third major push gave her hope. This time, former Dean of Engineering Denice Denton gave permission for a zero-resource Ph.D. program that would be administered without adding faculty or other overhead. Despite a lack of funding from the university, Ramey was elated. “It was a huge step for us,” she said.

The gamble paid off. By August, the university and state Legislature had resolved their conflict. The Board of Regents officially approved the program and the program was able to admit its first cohort of students in 2002.

A relieved Ramey can now say she’s happy to have devoted most of her energy to the task: “Without (the doctoral program), we wouldn’t be a player in the field.”

Farkas, who started teaching in the department at the same time as Ramey, agreed. He called Ramey’s success in acquiring the doctoral program “an enormous accomplishment” because it allowed the TC department to be taken more seriously within the engineering college.

He recalled that other engineering departments were initially suspicious of the integrity of technical communication as a field of study. “Not a lot of resources were lavished on us … in the old days,” he said.>>
Now the department receives millions of dollars in research grants, including funding from the prestigious National Science Foundation, and funding for the Lab for Usability Testing and Evaluation, an award-winning laboratory based on early research methods used at Carnegie Mellon University. Ramey said that such funding is “a measure of the worth of your ideas.”

Ramey credited the department’s professional, research-oriented culture as the principal reason for the department’s success. She said coursework in directed research in technical communication is a huge part of that, and she credited the students and their work ethic.

“The students in the program are the thought leadership in the field,” she said. “They’re not afraid to roll up their sleeves and get work done.”

Farkas believes it was Ramey’s even-handed, humane way of dealing with people as well as her teaching philosophy “to be the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage” that has allowed the department to flourish. “The research groups are really an embodiment of her teaching philosophy that moves learning more toward the student and away from the instructor,” he said.

“(Ramey) strives to be the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage.”
-UWTC Professor David Farkas

And it is this research that most excites Ramey about the growing field of technical communication. “We are just beginning to see the potential ourselves,” she reflects.

But she emphasized that even though the research culture within the field is relatively new, technical communication has been a profession for a long time. “Anytime you have a situation where you need to understand the human psychological, cultural or social surround of technology, there’s room for a TC person,” she notes.

Ramey said “awareness of TC as an educational discipline is traveling worldwide.” She has sought to take advantage of this potential during her time as chair by creating a student-faculty exchange between UWTC and the University of Twente in the Netherlands, a school Ramey said is the most similar to the UW in its dedication to technical communication in professional education.

She looks forward to exploring Twente in person this fall when she begins her European journey. Though she’ll no longer be chair of the department, Ramey has no plans to sit around. She plans to use her time off to regroup, “read the whole article instead of just the abstract” and learn new techniques before she returns to her roots of teaching usability testing and other forms of user research. ::

**Engineers Without Borders**

For members who cannot travel abroad, the group also plans to oversee a local project in the San Juan Islands national parks system that will have them design trails, composting toilets and environmentally friendly buildings for a children’s camp.

TC students were among the new recruits this year. Padvorac said TC students made a strong first impression and he was impressed with their passion and professionalism. “At our meeting they were very excited about putting their skills to use helping people,” he said.

Padvorac cited web and graphic design skills as specific areas in which TC students could contribute to EWB. He hopes future members will help to create a professional-looking website that is easier to maintain and update. He also said EWB needs graphical educational materials with well-designed icons to convey health and sanitation issues to the largely illiterate communities they serve, as well as outreach material such as brochures and flyers.

EWB is not only trying to recruit graduate students in TC; the organization also needs undergraduates to assure the group’s continued success. Elaine Chao, the group’s Secretary and currently the only freshman member, said while she was initially intimidated, she encourages people to get involved as freshman. She said the organization’s community involvement shows how much potential there is to tap into.

Padvorac emphasized that as long as the group continues to flourish as it has, “there will always be a role for TC students.” ::

To learn more about EWB, visit [http://students.washington.edu/ewbuw/](http://students.washington.edu/ewbuw/) or send an email to ewbuw@u.washington.edu
2007-08 Research Group Updates

UWTC is unique in that every faculty member invites undergraduate and graduate students to participate in directed research. Some groups continue through multiple quarters while others are a one-time offering. Below are the 2007-08 research updates. All photos courtesy of UWTC.

Podcasting Research Group

Program Coordinator Maggie Bardacke and Professor David Farkas, Advisers

The Winter 2007 Podcast Research Group explored podcasting technology by creating informational podcasts for the UWTC website. Students conducted interviews using digital recorders, edited files in Audacity or Garage Band, converted files to MP3s, and created an RSS feed to link their finished podcast through iTunes. Look for these podcasts to appear on the UWTC website soon!

Portfolios for Professional Preparation

Associate Professor Jennifer Turns, Adviser

With the support of the National Science Foundation (NSF), this group explores the educational benefits of having students construct professional portfolios. A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that reflects a student’s efforts, progress, or achievement in a given area. A course-based professional portfolio (CBP) is a portfolio in which all materials are drawn from a single course. Students construct a cross-curricular portfolio (CCP) with materials from a range of courses.

In 2007, the group launched a new study with a two-fold purpose. First, the study extends work to identify and document the educational and personal impacts of professional portfolio construction, particularly impacts on reflection, professional preparation, and professional identity. Second, the study compares CBP and CCP activities. Research results will expand the body of knowledge available to educators as they design learning experiences for undergraduate students.

Internet Based Research: Using Online Methods to Assess User Experiences

Professor Jan Spyridakis, Adviser

This research group of graduate and undergraduate students studies how features of online information affect user behavior, comprehension, and perceptions. Studies are scoped, designed, conducted, analyzed, and written up for publication by the group. During winter quarter 2007, the group explored aspects of social computing for future research consideration.

Laboratory for User-Centered Engineering Education (LUCEE)

Associate Professor Jennifer Turns, Adviser

Members of this group are researchers form diverse fields with an interest in education-related research issues and professional development. The group holds weekly round table meetings to discuss publication endeavors, conceptualize research frameworks, strategize research methods, support skill development, support further learning in guided qualitative research, and advise members on particular problems. Conversations are anchored in the work of group members such as paper abstracts, thesis chapters, conference presentations, preliminary exams, and application materials.

Communicative Practices in Virtual Workspaces

Professor Mark Zachry, Adviser

This group studies the complex communication patterns and application use behind professional documentation. The goal is to develop a way to track and analyze small events that contribute to a final document, and then present that data in a visual model that supports reflective knowledge work. For example, a person writing a proposal could compare the visual models for proposals, and then focus on the most productive communication patterns and application use.

The group draws heavily on activity theory, actor-network theory, and genre ecologies as they investigate ways to gather data in field studies and create a visual model. Current tasks include examining emerging social application technologies (often Web 2.0 applications), evaluating existing research on work in virtual environments, preparing for >>
field research of the tools and communication patterns of professional communicators, and developing techniques to create visualizations of the data.

Mobile User Experience Research Group
Professor Judy Ramey, Adviser

The Mobile User Experience (UX) research group explores the unique design challenges and specialized research requirements posed by the mobile environment. The group’s initial research study tracked a group of active mobile Internet users to understand their behaviors and motivations for use, posing the question, “Why do people access information via the mobile internet?” Representatives from the group presented their analysis, “A Framework for Understanding Mobile Internet Motivations and Behaviors,” at the Computer Human Interaction 2008 Conference in Florence, Italy.

Mobile UX is designing a follow-up study to validate and refine the proposed framework, to better understand how context affects behavior in this area, and to generate new research questions and product concepts. The group plans to explore the broader Mobile UX research literature and examine other applications of mobile technology including mobile training (m-learning).

Improving Information, Communication and Coordination Systems (ICCS) for Emergency Response and Management

Professor Mark Haselkorn, Adviser

The work of this research group concerns systematic challenges to effective ICCS in regional safety and systems, with particular emphasis on the management of catastrophic events. Group projects focus on multidisciplinary research questions surrounding preparedness, prevention, early warning, rescue, relief, and recovery in the context of ICCS. Partnering organizations include myriad humanitarian agencies, the Coast Guard, and the Area Maritime Security Committee. Through their work with these organizations, students interact with the front-line players in this active, evolving field of research. Students are engaged in developing the metrics and methodologies to assess the implementation of emergency management systems and decision support systems linked to the Pacific Rim Visualization and Analytics Center. Their work is part of an NSF-sponsored initiative to explore the emerging research frontier of “Humanitarian Service Science and Engineering.”

Cross-Cultural Issues that Affect Document Design of Technical Manuals

Professor Voichita Ghenghea, Adviser

The spring 2008 research group led by Voichita Ghenghea, a visiting Fulbright Scholar from the University Politehnica of Bucharest (Romania), focused on cross-cultural issues that affect document design in different languages. Undergraduate and graduate group members learned about differences and similarities in technical documentation designed for Romanian, German, and U.S. readers. The role of information transfer from professionals to laymen is of crucial importance; the group had many questions to investigate including:

• What are the cross-cultural issues in user manuals?
• How does technical documentation reveal its potential as a marketing tool?
• What are the consequences for document design?
• What should technical communicators and translators have in mind when disseminating specialized information for an international audience?

This weekly research group studies organizational/industrial psychology and professional/personal development. Key areas of concern include leadership skills, time management, team functioning skills, innovative thinking, work/life balance, and goal setting. The group researches how organizational/industrial psychologists study human behavior in the workplace; team members will consult with employers to study methods for improving the productivity and job satisfaction of employees and preserving employee health and morale. Members will also investigate how technical communicators can play a role in activities such as conducting job analyses to determine the key knowledge and skills necessary for a position or a team. These discussions and activities will prepare team members for leadership positions in the workplace and success in the academic environment.

Professional Development and Organizational Psychology
Lecturer Karen Kasonic, Adviser

This weekly research group studies organizational/industrial psychology and professional/personal development. Key areas of concern include leadership skills, time management, team functioning skills, innovative thinking, work/life balance, and goal setting. The group researches how organizational/industrial psychologists study human behavior in the workplace; team members will consult with employers to study methods for improving the productivity and job satisfaction of employees and preserving employee health and morale. Members will also investigate how technical communicators can play a role in activities such as conducting job analyses to determine the key knowledge and skills necessary for a position or a team. These discussions and activities will prepare team members for leadership positions in the workplace and success in the academic environment.
In The Real World

Each year posTComm invites alumni to submit an update regarding professional and personal pursuits. Below are this year’s responses. All photos courtesy of alumni.

Carol A. Taylor, ’83
BS General Studies
cctaylor.next.ui@gmail.com
Director of User Experience
Motricity

I am currently the Director of User Experience for Motricity, a mobile software service provider. In addition, I’m completing a TC Masters degree (Fall 08) with an emphasis on mobile technology adoption and experience, as well as human computer interaction. Our Mobile User Experience Research Group recently published our research as a Work in Progress at the CHI 2008 conference: A Framework for Understanding Mobile Internet Motivations and Behaviors.

Previously, I was responsible for managing the user experience for T-Mobile USA’s customer-facing online properties. In addition, I’ve been a principal at the Magi Group and Sakson & Taylor. I am also a published author of several third party software books.

Dale Washburn, ’88
BS General Studies
dale@washburncom.com
Washburn Communication
http://www.washburncommunication.com

Since graduating, I have grown Washburn Communication from a freelance practice into a successful consulting firm with 20 employees and an international client base which includes Fortune 500 technology firms. As was the case when I studied at UW, being in the real world has given me an opportunity to work with some incredibly talented communicators and to pursue creative solutions to our clients’ most challenging communication issues.

As the field has evolved, particularly through the advent of new, digital media and Web 2.0, I’ve found that the fundamental principles of technical communication have still remained the same. This has allowed me to keep pace with the dynamic nature of our profession and to meet the demands of our clients in increasingly innovative ways.

Carson Lemmen, ’89
BS General Studies
clemmen@witt-company.com
Witt Company – Document Imaging Solutions
http://www.witt-company.com

Out of college, I worked as a technical writer and sales support person for an accounting software company. Several years later, I started my sales career with Shultz’s Sausage in the University District, working retail and wholesale to restaurants and markets. Going on 12 years now, my work in the real world is business-to-business sales of office equipment and document imaging solutions. I am fortunate to serve some of the finest businesses and organizations in Seattle, including the UW. My work includes sales, implementation, and training for printers, digital multifunction printers (copy/print/scan/fax), graphics solutions, and document management tools.

Sales is educating customers on systems and solutions that can help them do their jobs more effectively, and through the sales process I have gained the confidence that I can support them.

My education from UWTC gives me unique insight into documents; how they are created, produced, distributed, and managed; it all takes time and effort. It is important to remember that machines don’t make documents, people make documents: it is their thoughts, ideas, and concepts that need to be read, understood, and acted upon for business to get done. Helping people produce documents more effectively, with better quality and with less impact on the environment, is what I enjoy about my work.

Dyan Pfitzenmeier, ’92
Certificate in Technical Writing and Editing
dyanpfitz@gmail.com
President (self-employed)
Firefly


I use my imagination to craft messages that convey people’s passion for work and life. In 2001, I started Firefly, a consulting business that specializes in strategic messages and integrated marketing. My communication style respects clarity and humanity; a similar perspective personifies my daily life.

My key interests are art, literature, architecture, and engineering, and I advocate ecologically-restorative design. I like to travel, read, write, enjoy music, and catch my breath in the open air.
Kevin Smith, ’92
BSTC
kevsmi@yahoo.com
Safeco Insurance

The UWTC program was my launching pad, and I gained valuable skills from great professors like Judy Ramey and David Farkas. From this foundation, my career in technical writing and usability began. I learned that I could have fun with technology without having to debug any code!

After many years of technical writing and information design, my focus turned to usability. I enjoy meeting project teams across every line of business and seeing their eyes light up as they observe end-user experience firsthand. By identifying pain points and adding solid recommendations based on usability best practice, teams can apply resources for real improvements. Usability is an easy sell and is taking hold as a requirement for critical applications. Before, teams asked for help with last minute testing, when major changes were impossible and I became the bearer of bad news. Today, field visits, early prototype testing, and heuristic reviews are making iterative user-centered design a reality. No question—making a difference yields greater job satisfaction!

It’s true that organizations vary in their usability maturity, and it’s often a hard fight to get project managers and executives to see the light. A word of encouragement: usability has a snowball effect. A few success stories yields advocates, which yields more critical projects that in turn yields greater visibility and more demand as people see the value. My best advice? Lecturing and brown bags can only do so much. Exposing user pain is worth a thousand reports!

Gerald S. Ferry, ’96
BSTC
gsferry@hotmail.com
Minecode
http://www.minecode.com

Looking back, I appreciate all the support and motivation provided by my professors at UWTC, which instilled confidence in my approach of thinking outside the box. This confidence has carried through into my professional career. Now that I’m in the real world, I really enjoy researching new ideas. It’s fulfilling to be able to put ideas into practice via new products and applications.

I’m considering a return to UWTC to complete graduate degree focusing on user-centered design in new media. The work environment is quickly moving to an online and collaborative venue, and with things like mashups and collaboration being hot topics. I see an opportunity to help drive good practices regarding how we present and combine information in this environment.

John Maki, ’96
Certificate of Technical Writing and Editing
john.e.maki@boeing.com
Business Operations Specialist
The Boeing Company

After graduating from the TC program, I worked for eight years as a technical writer in Boeing’s Creative Services organization, primarily developing training content and delivery systems for Computer Networking Operations and Commercial Airplane Industrial Engineering organizations. In 2004, I moved into a business operations position, and supported the Supplier Management and Business Continuity organizations. I currently manage the Shared Services Group Business Plan Review process, designing and developing scorecard and key performance indicator systems. My daughters, Kelsey and Kirstin are at college in Texas and Oregon. My wife Kathleen is the Manager of Volunteer Programs at the Seattle Art Museum.

Norman Ely, ’95
MSTC
norm@normely.com
Self-employed
http://www.normely.com

I am still freelancing, helping people maintain their HTML websites, though I am also getting some work helping people manage and optimize their pay per click advertising and search engine rankings. I am also doing some e-commerce consulting, setting up shopping carts and such. I really like working at home and setting my own hours.
In my work, I enjoy creative collaboration and learning. I’m currently involved in developing scoring systems, so my interest in words and communication has broadened to include data visualization. I enjoy teaching business and engineering colleagues how to make their often-befuddling data “come alive” for their audiences.

From my time at UWTC, I gained faith that clear and compelling communication can make a difference in a business setting. We all know when something “communicates” and when it doesn’t. If you’re just getting started in technical writing, my advice is to keep your communication ideals in the forefront of everything you do. You’ll have to fight some battles, but in the end you’ll be recognized for the quality and integrity you bring to your work and team.

Jason D. Grose, ’97
BSTC
jason@grose.us
United States Marine Corps
http://www.grose.us

Since graduating in 1997, I have served as an Adjutant (administration officer) for a Tank Battalion and at a Regimental level. I was promoted to the rank of Captain in the Marine Corps, where I continued to use my Technical Communication skills as the administration officer for an infantry Regiment. I then earned a Master’s degree in information technology management and used those skills to run an $8 million dollar project that tracked all the formal training in the Marine Corps. I have been promoted to Major and am currently serving in San Diego as an Operations Officer, but will be going to Saudi Arabia for a year starting this summer to train the Royal Saudi Marines. Upon my return, I will retire after 22 years of service in the Marine Corps and move back to the Seattle area, where I hope to start a career in the IT industry.

Scott Mogull, ’98
MSTC
smogull@austincc.com
Associate Professor Adjunct
Department of Business and Technical Communications
Austin Community College
http://www.mogullonline.com

I am an Associate Professor Adjunct in the Technical Communications Department at Austin Community College. I am also working on a PhD in Technical Communication at Texas Tech University. I received a Master’s degree in Microbiology from the University of Texas at Austin, and have eight years of experience in technical writing, marketing, and management in biotech. I’ve published a first-author scientific paper in Be Your Own Boss: Tracey Freel on Freelancing

Alumni Profiles: by Julia Ricketts

Who hasn’t daydreamed about the ideal work-from-home situation? The notion of being your own boss has a certain appeal. So does making your own schedule, and saying “so long” to your fellow commuters. However, trading a steady paycheck for the unknowns of self-employment is a daunting prospect for many TC professionals.

One UWTC alumna is living the laptop-on-a-beach (or at least, the laptop-on-a-couch) dream of working for herself. After nearly ten years’ employment in the corporate sector, Tracey Freel made the leap into freelance work in 2007, launching her one-woman company Pen to Paper. Two of her current clients are Projectline Services Inc., a marketing consulting firm that serves large technology clients, and Digital One Corporation, a full-service consulting firm helping technology companies bring products to market.

A UW education and solid industry experience form the foundation of Freel’s current venture. After earning an English degree (BA 1999), she began her career at Amazon.com, where she wrote training materials, designed templates, and improved dispute resolution procedures. Interested in the emerging TC field, she returned to the department to earn two certificates (User-Centered Design and Technical Writing and Editing) and a master’s degree (MS 2004). She joined Microsoft Press full-time in 2004, working on a team responsible for the content and design of major publication covers. “I would definitely recommend working in a corporate collaborative environment before venturing out freelance,” she says.

Freel also maintains a strong relationship with UWTC, where she is Affiliate Assistant Professor of Technical Communication. She is quick to credit the faculty who mentored her: “These people are leaders in the field,” she >>
Infection & Immunity and authored Modern Scientific Communication, a textbook recommended by the World Health Organization for inclusion in medical faculty libraries. I’m a member of the American Medical Writers Association, Association of Teachers of Technical Writers, and Society for Technical Communication.

Mark Alway, ’99
BSTC
uwtc@markalway.com
President, YouthTracker.net, a division of Phipps Custom Solutions, LLC
Educational Outreach Instructor, University of Washington Area Staff, Youth Dynamics
Back-end Engineer, PWG Design
http://www.youthtracker.net
http://security.markalway.com
http://www.markalway.com

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borenmt@ldschurch.org
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
http://www.northtemple.com

Kelli and I have lived in the Salt Lake City area since we moved from Washington four years ago. We have seven beautiful kids, the youngest (Grace) having been born last February. I work for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (familiarly known as the Mormon Church) as an interaction designer, working mostly on states. “The fact that I learned page layout from [Professor] David Farkas or usability from [Professor and outgoing Chair] Judy Ramey is just huge [in terms of] credibility.” Knowing research outcomes and current best practices also “really helps you sell your ideas to your clients,” she adds.

Diverse job experience and a strong network of industry contacts are two reasons Freel felt confident considering a freelance path. “It’s definitely not for everyone,” she cautions. “But, it has its perks… My commute most days is from the bed to the couch.” With consulting projects in the U.S, and Europe, Freel admits business hours can be long. “I occasionally have to set up a call from Germany for midnight,” she says, and with two PDAs in her stylish handbag, she is clearly never very far from the office. To avoid being consumed by work, she advocates a balance between being available and having downtime. “You have to set business hours,” says Freel.

Occasional tropical vacations help, too. ::

How can you determine if a freelance path might be right for you?
Tracey Freel recommends assessing your strengths and seeing if they support the particular challenges of self-employment. “You have to be self-directed, and have a strong work ethic,” she notes. To get perspective, seek outside input: “I had some really candid conversations with past employers (that) helped me in my decision… Find out what people think about you.”
internal web applications and occasionally on public-facing ones. One public project I am working on is an update to a mapping application that helps people find congregations and meetinghouses near them. This lets me get back to scenarios and technologies I really enjoyed while working on MapPoint and Streets & Trips at Microsoft. I love making life easier for those who use the systems I help design, whether it’s helping them prepare to serve a mission for the Church or find a place to worship. My current role involves not only design, but also requirements gathering, needs analysis, usability, and lots of communication and leadership. My Master’s degree helped me prepare in all of those areas.

Shawna (Garrity) Burkey, ’99
BSTC, MSIS, MBA
shawnaburkey@yahoo.com
Business Systems Analyst
City of Renton

After spending a couple of years as a Technical Writer, I determined that I really liked being involved in specification reviews and the design aspect of software development. I am now a Business Systems Analyst for the City of Renton, where I mainly support the Fire Department. Most of my software experience has been with building applications, but at the City we don’t have a development team to maintain applications, so we buy everything off the shelf. Selecting and implementing systems to fit your business rules is quite different than building a custom system, so I am enjoying the change and learning new things.

Of all the classes that I took while earning my Bachelor’s degree, the most important thing I learned is how to communicate clearly. That really helped my transition from writing help files to writing software specifications. Now that I’m in the real world, I am really glad that I don’t have homework every night when I get home. There are still tests, but rather than a letter grade, I get to measure my success based on my user’s happiness with the end product.

Emily Bauer Hofmann, ’99
MSTC
ejbauer@uwalumni.com
Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation

I am a licensing manager with the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, which is the designated patent management organization for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I really enjoy seeing new inventions emerge from the university and working with companies that are hoping to commercialize them. The technology transfer process certainly is challenging, but also very rewarding. My husband Paul and I live in Waunakee, WI, with our baby girl and two cats.

Alumni Profiles: by Julia Ricketts

Jacob Burghardt Envisions Tools for Better Product Design in New Book

A forthcoming book by Jacob Burghardt, Working Through Screens: 100 Ideas for Envisioning Powerful, Engaging, and Productive User Experiences in Knowledge Work, promises to be an exciting tool for product development teams. The book draws from diverse sources to create a new framework for developing complex computing tools. Each of the 100 “envisioning ideas” offers a topic for critical discussion, accompanied by examples from architecture, research, and financial trading. “I wanted to distill ideas (about human-computer interaction) from academia and present them in a more accessible format that designers and knowledge workers of different backgrounds can use,” explains the author.

After graduating from the UW in 2000 with a double major in Psychology and Technical Communication, Burghardt found his skills and interests were not confined to a single field. “I stumbled into designing tools for specialized work,” he says. His diverse job experiences include designing stock trading applications and developing instrumentation and analysis tools for scientists. Interested in synthesizing his knowledge of user experience with product design, he began “trying to get further and further forward in the process…to strategy.” Appropriately, Working Through Screens focuses on this early—and critical—stage of development in which product use, direction, structure, and scope are determined.

Burghardt reflects that in the workplace, “the more specific the needs, the more complex the product, the worse (the) designs often are… the time pressures and culture can mean essential elements get missed or not prioritized.” Armed with his book, the knowledge workers of tomorrow may change this paradigm. “If I was to summarize the main point of the whole book, it’s to get people to take a minute before they start to design the details. For more information, visit www.flashbulbinteraction.com.” ::
Anne (Mikolajcik) de Ridder, ’99
MSTC
annederidder@mac.com
User Experience Architect
White Horse

Since graduating, I’ve been able to work as a Technical Writer, Editor, Usability Engineer, User Experience Designer, Information Architect, and more. I think the TC program gave me the skills to move freely between different aspects of our field and be successful in each. I appreciate that all of the Master’s course content is tied to real life. I feel the classes really prepared me for what is expected of me in my daily job. In a way, the real world for me has been a lot like school. I get to learn about all sorts of new and exciting topics, and I continue to build and expand my skill set as I go.

Recently, I started working for White Horse as a User Experience Architect focused on website design, after taking a break to have a baby, beautiful Willem Gerrit de Ridder. Previously, I worked as a User Experience Designer, identifying hardware and software test equipment solutions for video broadcast professionals. In my spare time, I publish an automotive newsletter distributed to over 1,300 members worldwide, which received an Excellence award from my local STC chapter in January.

Of all the aspects of User Experience design, my favorite part is analyzing customer data and translating that data into a design concept. The “aha” moment, when you’ve finished sorting through all the different types of data you’ve gathered and seeing that overarching commonality and theme you can use in a design, is really exciting and rewarding.

Amy E. Brons, ’00
Certificate of Technical Writing and Editing
amybrons@hotmail.com
Technical Writer GE

As well as our growing list of digital games. I use both sides of the certificate skills (editing and writing), though the editing work is heavier. The position entails not only the standard copyediting duties, but about 50% developmental editing (rules creation and game development). I also get to work on sell text, marketing text, web text, and whatever else comes along to me in the New Business Group. It’s a great, creative atmosphere, and a good mix of fun and work in an effort to make a product that people love.

Jamie Myxter, ’00
MSTC
jamie_myxter@hotmail.com
http://www.precisioncommunications.org/

I recently moved to Okanogan County, Washington, with my new wife Charlotte. I continue consulting and teaching in our new community. Teaching and communications are the parts of my TC experience that transcend the industry and touch many parts of my work and life.

I’m interviewing people for a book on the topic of “life-changing events,” those big things that happen to us that help us re-shape and change our perspective in lasting ways.

Alex Thayer, ’00, ’04
BSTC, MSTC
huevos@alumni.washington.edu
http://www.alexthayer.com

Recent publications include an article on content analysis research methods (Journal of Technical Writing and Communication) and an article discussing socio-cultural perspectives on violence in digital games (pending publication with the Association of Computing Machinery).
Scott Bush, ’01
BSTC
scott.bush@gmail.com
Quadrant Homes
I manage www.QuadrantHomes.com

Tristan Robinson, ’01
MSTC
tristan_robinson@yahoo.com
Tektronix
I will finish a Master’s of Business Administration at Portland State this spring. I entered the program with a lot of hesitation, but the hesitation was not related to curriculum: I was worried about giving up every spare minute for another two years. But now that it’s mostly behind me, I’m really glad I did it. It’s a great complement to the MSTC. And spending the summer studying business in southern France was a nice mid-degree perk, too. With additional background provided by the MBA program, I will finally be in a position to communicate more authoritatively with my marketing colleagues. Also, I will have greater latitude in the types of position that are available to me.

The part I like the most of being a usability engineer is creating good product designs, and the best way to create good designs is through research with customers. So, I have been moving toward market research in my work at Tektronix and really enjoy the change. The best thing about being in the real working world is having real problems to solve with real constraints. I like to have my approaches to problem solving limited only by my imagination and the resources available.

Amy Guenther, ’02
BSTC
literaryillustration@hotmail.com
Technical Writer
Talyst
http://www.linkedin.com/in/amyguenther
I am currently writing software manuals for hospital pharmacy software, and I have just started putting the information into an online help format, which is exciting.
What I enjoy most about being in the real world is having the opportunity to see my work being used by people who actually need it. The part of my work I love the most is the time I get to spend editing (my own work, or anyone else’s). I love creating order out of disorder, and cleaning up mistakes that could otherwise undermine a beautiful piece of writing.

Looking back, there are two things I highly value from my time at UWTC. First, the technical knowledge I gained from classes such as Computer Documentation and Style in Scientific and Technical Writing. And second, the many practical tips and tricks, which other students shared generously as we all scrambled to complete our projects.

Joel Hamill, ’02
BSTC
joel.hamill@gmail.com
IBM Corporation
I live in San Francisco and have been working as a technical writer for IBM for seven years now. I enjoy the freedom that my job affords me: I can literally work from anywhere in the world as long as I have an Internet connection.

From my time at UWTC, I appreciate that the program offered real world coursework and assignments. Also, the numerous connections provided to the outside professional community were crucial when it came time to find a job.

Miriam B. Kennedy, ’02
MSTC
savvyseamstress@comcast.net
mjbkennedy@comcast.net
Owner
Savvy Seamstress
http://www.savvyseamstress.com
Since graduating in 2002 as part of the first evening TC program, I have been working in a field that I have enjoyed as a hobby since I was a child. In February 2008 I launched my own seamstress business, Savvy Seamstress. What I enjoy most is being my own boss, exercising my sewing skills, working with clients, and managing a small business.

I enjoyed graduate school and appreciate the knowledge to which I was exposed and learned. I am looking forward to incorporating my skills and knowledge in running my business.

My husband Tom and I celebrated our 10th anniversary in October 2007 by renewing our vows at Sugar Beach Resort on Maui. I sewed my dress and Tom’s shirt, and wore my original headpiece.
Susan Hawkins Invests in User Experience

Alumna Susan Hawkins is an exemplar of the idea that individuals who are drawn towards technical communication also tend to be natural leaders. For more than twenty years, Hawkins has honed her skills in user experience, research, and design through various leadership roles. She now serves as Senior Vice President of Metavante eBanking, one of twelve divisions that make up Metavante Corporation, a leading company that provides banking and payment technologies to financial services firms and businesses.

“It’s a great opportunity for stewardship and a tremendous opportunity to bring products to market—to the end user,” Hawkins said. “I am fortunate to be in the position to invest large amounts in the area of user experience.”

Before moving to this position in 2007, Hawkins managed product management, solution assurance, user experience and product research and design. But as Senior Vice President of the division, her accountability now includes everything it takes to run a business—business operations, product strategy, architecture, development, QA, technical operations, client support, customer support, and P&L (profit and loss) management. A typical day entails early morning client calls and systems status calls; stacks of meetings (a handful for which she gives a presentation internally or externally); and weekly travel to client sites, which are spread all over the U.S.

Amidst the heavy responsibilities and tightly packed days, Hawkins emphasized that the work had many other rewards, especially her colleagues: “That’s what keeps me going: being able to work with really creative and disciplined professionals,” Hawkins said. “It’s very refreshing to work with those folks.”

Hawkins’s interest in having a career in industry was sparked during her work toward her Master’s in Technical Communication from the UW. She said the department and industry’s innovative energy greatly interested her at the time, so it was a great opportunity to mix together the communication and engineering disciplines. Hawkins was happy to report that there was “no shortage of opportunities” upon graduation those many years ago.

“I am tremendously grateful for the education I received from [the UWTC],” said Hawkins, who still keeps the teachings of her mentors close to her heart. “I still [remember and] use the important basics: understanding my audience and communicating well to them.”

By Amanda Ahn

Nathan Moore, ’02
BSTC
nathanmo@u.washington.edu
Sandia National Laboratories

This year I moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to take a postdoctoral position at Sandia National Laboratories. Although my research focus has changed, the skills I learned from UWTC have been my constant guide. Science is a business of information, and the universes we study, both large and small, can be hard to navigate. Only a user perspective can steer us towards useful discoveries and teach us how to communicate them effectively. It’s something I’m still learning as I write, collaborate, and interact with our funding agencies. It has also been helpful for developing various user-interfaces and documentation this year. On the lighter side, my wife and I have enjoyed exploring the rugged southwest and practicing Spanish.

Raina Richart, ’04
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The Mosaic Company

I’ve been working as a Consultant with The Mosaic Company for about two and a half years, and it’s been great! I’ve learned so much. I get to travel a lot, meet new people, and see new places all the time. I’ve spent time in Texas, Michigan, and Hawaii for different projects. I use so much of what I learned in the TC program every day, from writing and editing to web design and help system authoring. I’m very happy that I’ve found such a great way to use my TC experience out in the real world, doing work that I really enjoy.

Alumni Profiles:

by Amanda Ahn
Carolyn Wei, PhD: One Year Out

When the typical TC keyboard jockey does a Google search on themselves, a smattering of results might appear. Thanks to her current research work and numerous publications on mobile devices in developing countries and Internet-based research, Carolyn Wei has pages of results. It’s fitting that she would have so much online coverage, since the user-experience researcher now works for Google. Since Wei graduated in Spring 2007 as the first-ever graduate from UWTC’s PhD program, she’s been filling her days meeting with users, publishing her research, and presenting the findings at technology conferences.

Wei said being the first UWTC doctoral graduate is quite an honor. She started the program in 2002, its inaugural year after finishing her master’s degree in the department. Four and a half years later, she had to find a way to transfer the skills she learned doing field research in Central Asia to the working world.

Wei chose to work for Google because she said it’s a company that works on whole products. “It’s exciting to see the work I do roll out to actual consumers,” she said.

Wei is particularly interested in exploratory and formative research that employs “forward-looking questions.” She credited the doctoral program with helping her to hone her research skills, which she uses in her current research that focuses on helping improve Webmaster tools.

Her professional goal is to publish portions of her dissertation in conference papers and journal articles. Her dissertation explored how some people use mobile phones to support romantic relationships and how technology is used to support secret or long-distance relationships.

When she’s not focused on research, she also serves on Google’s Diversity Advisory Council and the UWTC Diversity board.

Carolyn Wei, PhD: One Year Out

by Amy Monroe

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Rich DeSantis, ’05
MSTC
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Northrop Grumman
http://www.richdesantis.com

I live in Atlanta, GA, and work as a Systems and Interface Designer for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on a contract through Northrop Grumman. Most of my work involves creating functional prototypes in either Dreamweaver or Visio, handing them off to a .Net coder, and then doing some follow-up usability work on the final design. I enjoy my work quite a lot, as I am afforded the time to do plenty of audience analysis, create personas, and include usability and user-centered design principles throughout the process. My experience at UWTC elevated my perspective and my potential in so many ways that it couldn’t possibly fit into a paragraph. Thanks to Judy Ramey, the faculty, and my fellow students for enriching my life.

Shirin Tabrizi, ’05
BSTC
shirint@microsoft.com
Microsoft
posTComm 2005

From my time at UWTC, I appreciate having been exposed to so many different technologies. Learning the basics of a number of key programs (PowerPoint, Dreamweaver, Photoshop, RoboHelp, etc.) was very handy.

Now that I’m in the real world, I enjoy having the opportunity to be recognized for my work and being awarded when I excel. Grades just don’t match up to bonuses. Also, I enjoy the people I work with. I am very fortunate to have an active and social group of coworkers. We strive to make every workday “fun” and, more often than not, we are successful.

Josh LaMar, ’06
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When I started out at WaMu, just before I graduated from UWTC, the corporate intranet, WaMu.net didn’t have any formal usability program. I began by helping out with survey creation and data analysis for a pilot program, the WaMu.net Users Group. The program was a success! Soon, business groups from all over were coming to us to perform research on how their internal sites were being used and what users cared about. In 2006, when it was time for the project manager to move on to a new role, I took over the management of the group. At the same time, I started doing full time user research. Now I’m on a dedicated User Experience team which looks at all our internal tools and applications.

What I enjoy most about being in the “real world” is the opportunity to apply my knowledge to real problems. I’ve
also really enjoyed having the opportunity to work with other engaging and inspiring people here at WaMu and through my involvement in the Puget Sound SIGCHI. “Never stop learning” is my philosophy!

In my free time, I continue to sing with The Esoterics, read poetry, do yoga, attend concerts, and watch trashy reality television (amid documentaries).

Feiya Wang, ’06
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Expeditors International of Washington, Inc.
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I’ve been working at Expeditors ever since I did my summer internship there. The people are great and I love working downtown. Looking back at my time at UWTC, I would have to say TC 401 – Style in Scientific and Technical Writing has been the most useful and influential in shaping me as a writer and editor. Jan, you rock! The only regret I have is not taking more creative writing classes to keep in touch with my creative side of writing. I’ve been thinking of working towards writing a book, but having never written anything more than 10 or 15 pages, it’s a bit daunting. It’s so easy to get hung up on technical aspects and not get around to the actual writing. Also, I recently got engaged to my boyfriend of four and a half years! And on that note, I hope everyone has a great year. Don’t forget about why you love writing and keep on reading!

Lara Keffer, ’07
MSTC
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User Experience Researcher
Microsoft

After graduation, I started in a contract position as a Usability Engineer at Microsoft in the MSN division. It was a great job experience with wonderful people. Currently, I hold a permanent position at Microsoft as a User Experience Researcher working with the Windows Server Solutions Group on the Small Business Server. Although it is a new start in a new position, the work environment is still wonderful: I love the people and the products I work with. The nature of my job is interactive and rewarding. I love hearing user feedbacks on products (and discovering all the things they don’t know they say). I like the challenge of working on a product from start to finish and being able to add that product work to my toolkit. And it’s so rewarding to watch the product – be it a website or software – change and grow.

My fiancé and I recently moved to Kirkland and we love it! There is so much to do within walking distance and it’s a short commute to work.

Ariel van Spronsen, ’07
MSTC
User Experience Architect
ZAAZ

I had the pleasure of working with Tamara Adlin, another UWTC alumna, doing personas and user experience consulting for several clients. I’m now a User Experience Architect at ZAAZ, an interactive web design firm. The agency life has been a great fit for me: fast-paced, with varied projects that require me to do things a bit differently each time, which keeps my creative juices flowing. My TC background has really helped me to express the goals of user groups when they approach websites, both their stated and implied objectives. I also am a strong advocate for streamlined content that fits the interaction. In my off time, I keep the geek in me alive through Meetups and conferences, yoga, and occasional festival. I also spend much more time with friends than I did when I was in grad school.

Carolyn Wei, ’07
User Experience Researcher
PhD, MSTC
Google


I’m working at Google in Kirkland, WA, where I support social applications such as Gmail and Talk. I like making an impact on products that are used by millions of people around the world. I also like that I am part of an intellectual community and am learning from my colleagues. The quantitative and qualitative research experience I had at UWTC has been invaluable to my work, as have the internships I did at various companies and research labs while in graduate school. Since finishing my PhD last year, I have been busy making up for lost time by reading for pleasure (25 books since I defended my dissertation!).
Matthew Shobe Runs with a Really Big Idea

In the age of internet start-ups and Web 2.0, it can be difficult for a budding entrepreneur to stand out from the crowd. UWTC alumnus Matthew Shobe has found a way to use his education to his advantage.

In 2004, Shobe and three colleagues created FeedBurner, a web-based RSS feed management provider with headquarters in Chicago. FeedBurner is an everyday destination for bloggers because it provides them with tools to promote their material and monitor readership. It also allows users to become members of the FeedBurner Ad Network, giving them the option to make their blogs profitable. FeedBurner has enhanced the blog-reading experience in several ways—for example, blogs now have automatic links to sharing sites like digg and del.icio.us. In June 2007, FeedBurner was acquired by Google, but the focus of the site remains the same.

Shobe credits UWTC with helping him provide the groundwork for FeedBurner’s creation as well as several other start-ups he has been involved with. “The department’s reach into business, government, and other academic departments provides its students with uncommonly fertile ground for testing varied career aspirations.”

During his time at University of Washington, Shobe had the opportunity to complete an internship with Spry, a company that published one of the first consumer internet access packages. It was during that internship that Shobe got his first taste of entrepreneurialism. In particular, he was inspired by Spry’s user-centered practice, which later motivated him to focus on the user with his own development projects. His goal is to make the user experience simple and effective.

As Co-Founder and Chief Design Officer of FeedBurner, Shobe faces many challenges in software design, and he has learned a lot through his years as an entrepreneur. “You’re going to be faced with some challenges that inevitably overcome you; pick yourself back up, dust yourself off, and figure what you’ll change the next time up,” he says. “Whether you’re a one-person proprietorship or are joining a team in a high-powered multinational operation. You’ll be more successful if you have an appetite for some risk.”

Shobe also credits the Master of Science in TC program with his initial successes in networking and discovering his passions. “Finding out what really strikes your passion is vital to any success you achieve, and being a student in UWTC is a license to sample different business environments and technical disciplines (user experience, documentation and help authoring, and field/lab research) if you’re willing to use the connections the Department can help you make.”

Shobe has some words of wisdom for current students: “Surround yourself with smart people whose points of view you respect, and who make you laugh. You may just find the genesis of a Really Big Idea among yourselves and turn your crew into a cohesive team that can chase it down.”

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by Natasha Jones

PhD candidate Natasha Jones presented a research paper about public perception of national disasters at the 2008 annual CCCC conference in New Orleans.

Natasha Jones at CCCC

At the beginning of spring quarter, I had the opportunity of attending and presenting a paper at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, otherwise known as “the Cs” or “the 4Cs”. The Convention was held April 2nd through 5th in New Orleans, LA. Thanks to a travel stipend from the Technical Communication department and funding from the Graduate School Fund for Excellence and Innovation (GSFEI), my hotel, transportation, and meals were completely paid for—which helped tremendously considering my graduate student budget.

The CCCC was my first experience presenting at a national conference. CCCC proved to be a perfect forum to present a paper that I had completed during my Master’s program. This year’s conference was chaired by the renowned Charles Bazerman and the theme was “Writing Realities, Changing Realities.” I presented on a panel with two professors, Keith Gibson from Utah State University and Tiffany Portewig from Auburn University. I had taken courses from both of these brilliant professors in the past and I was relieved that these experienced presenters were able to help guide me through my first official national conference presentation.

Our panel, entitled “The Scientific Construction of Political Reality,” included a paper that focused on the visual rhetoric in Al Gore’s book, An Inconvenient Truth. The panel also included a discussion of rhetorical consensus in the climate change debate and my paper: “The Anatomy of an Accident: Correctly Defining the Challenger and Columbia Disasters,” which examined the construction of political realities after the Challenger and Columbia disasters and how the definition of these national disasters as accidents affected the way the nation perceived the real and imagined dangers of space flight.

My first experience presenting at a national conference turned out to be a rewarding one. I received good, positive feedback about my paper and the topic in general. I received some encouraging suggestions about avenues to research further and investigate more deeply. I learned the art of academic “shmoozing” (as my mentor calls it), while enjoying myself in one of the most intriguing cities I’ve ever visited.

The experience of going to an academic conference is invaluable; it gives you an opportunity to further develop your research, practice articulating your ideas and presenting your written work, and see what research is currently being undertaken in a given field. I highly recommend that any serious student, if given the chance, attend at least one conference at some point during his or her academic career. ::
Cover photo by Jonathan Morgan: Sieg Hall, the soon-to-be new home of the Department of Technical Communication, was built in 1960 and often appeared on UW postcards. It was known as the General Engineering Hall until 1972, when the exterior was remodeled to create a look that meshed with the upper campus Gothic Revival style. TC is looking forward to putting its own spin on the interior space!

Back cover photo by Jonathan Morgan: Students stroll past Drumheller Fountain on the UW campus in Seattle...perhaps to UWTC’s new home in Sieg Hall?

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