The annual magazine for alumni and friends of the University of Washington

Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering

Summer 2009
Message from the Chair

Time of Transition

2008–2009 has been a dynamic year that will not soon be forgotten. It has been a year of transition. We have come through an incredible amount of change in a very short time, all the stronger and better for the experience. We have a new name, a new physical location, four new tenure track faculty, a new department chair, new degree programs, new curricula, and more students in the entering class than ever before. As it was a time of beginnings for our new faculty who taught their first classes, it is a time of endings for Tom Williams, who taught his last official HCDE class and will be retiring next autumn.

The change of name from Technical Communication to Human Centered Design & Engineering (HCDE) was not undertaken lightly. A task force of our best and brightest spent many days and nights working to find an elegant solution. And even after the name was official on January 1, 2009, we had a last-minute identity crisis over “to hyphen or not to hyphen.” Alas and alack, most style guides state that you do not hyphenate proper nouns. And our department title is indeed that—a proper noun. Of course, you should realize our concession when we gave in on the hyphen but adopted the ampersand!

And only those of you who shared some time with us in the bowels of Loew Hall or the Engineering library, or chasing bats in the rafters of the Engineering Annex would understand why those in HCDE so appreciate the light-filled offices of Sieg Hall, with its wide hallways, windows that open and bring in Seattle sun, meeting rooms, and a true student lounge. Our new faculty, Cindy Atman, Julie Kientz, Sarah Kriz, and Charlotte Lee, have settled in and now seem like they have been with us a very long time. Of course, it helps to have us all sharing one big echoing circular hallway in Sieg—we know each other’s business and see each other’s smiling faces on a daily basis. The department also experienced a shift in staffing this year when I gained a full-time assistant, Julianna Jones, who has proven to be a wonderful Jill of all trades, and Kate Long became our publications coordinator extraordinaire.

Along with the department name change came new programs and curricula. What a great time to get Jen Turns to sign on as the Associate Chair of Learning and Mark Zachry to succeed her as Associate Chair of Academics. Jen Turns and Gian Bruno, our Adademic Adviser, and Maggie Bardacke, our Program Coordinator, have heralded through new HCDE degree titles for the BS, MS, and PhD programs and created a variety of degree pathways within the degree programs. These hard efforts have paid off big time.

In closing, I hope you enjoy reading the articles in our first issue of re:Design as much as I have. The editorial and production team has worked day and night to bring you this publication and created a great set of articles about our doings this past year. You can find out more about our escapades by sitting down and planning for a very good read.

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On January 1, 2009, the Department of Technical Communication (TC) rang in the new year with a new department name: Human Centered Design & Engineering (HCDE). The new name helps to highlight the expanding curriculum and research of a department that has been in the UW College of Engineering for over three decades.

A name change for the department has been brewing for some time but really began in fall 2008. Faculty and staff had small-group discussions over different words and phrases relating to the department’s curriculum and “Technical Communication.” Everyone was aware of the challenging task that naming such a long-standing, multidimensional department would be. As Assistant Professor Julie Kientz emphasized, the new name can’t just be the name of a specific research area, but needs to encompass the entire department and evoke the right imagery and ideas for current industry professionals and prospective students.

A small committee representing faculty, staff, students, and alumni was formed and members worked hard to find ideas, comments, and feedback. The committee spent hours exploring name ideas in a continuous process of contacting people from industry and colleges across and outside of the country.

Represented colleges include the University of California, Irvine; the University of Toronto; Carnegie Mellon; Georgia Tech; Penn State; the University of Texas; Michigan State; and many others. People were excited to hear about the change, and many professors and industry professionals found the prospect of a name change interesting and innovative. One professor from the University of Wisconsin wrote in an email, “What an interesting change, I like it!”

A wide variety of industry professionals were contacted in search of ideas and feedback on possible names. An email with possible name ideas was even sent out to over 1,000 Microsoft employees who work closely with communication and production experts. The committee received many valuable responses that helped them explore and finalize a new name.

The hundreds of emails, phone calls, and meetings resulted in a new name for our department that is both contemporary and representative of what we do.

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by Sophia Fong

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Sieg Hall Move
from Cellar...

School is out, and students and birds alike twitter happily in the summer sun—a sun that HCDE actually got to see this year! No longer must we suffer in (relative) silence, relegated to the dungeon commonly known as Loew’s basement. HCDE now resides in the esteemed Sieg Hall, called “The Pride of UW” by its (rather sardonic) prior inhabitants, the Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) department.

Sieg has a fairly rich history, starting as recently as 1960, when $1,061,468 bought UW a new building. It’s “contemporary design” was even featured on a 25-cent postcard. But even masterfully engineered engineering buildings don’t last forever, and Sieg’s contemporary columns soon started crumbling. By 1999, students were taking chunks home with them. One CSE graduate student reportedly based his decision to attend UW on his chunk of Sieg. “How could I say ‘no’ to a school that gave me a piece of their computer science building?” he asked.

Regrettably, students can no longer pilfer chunks of Sieg; the building was remodeled to fix that—a mere $6,500 per column. But at least we know Sieg’s remodeled columns can withstand earthquakes. After an earthquake in March 2001, someone sent an email to the dean of CSE saying, “I’m sorry to hear that Sieg is still standing. Better luck next quake!” As of the January 2009 earthquake, that luck had not improved.

(continued on page 4)
HCDE’s new locale encompasses the entire fourth floor of Sieg and some of the third. Highlights include upgraded facilities for the Laboratory for Usability Testing and Evaluation (LUTE), a bigger and better lounge (it even has couches!), and—you might want to sit down for this one—windows. That’s right my friends, we can actually see the sun. That is, whenever those persistent Seattle clouds decide to let it through. Many HCDE students are thoroughly enjoying our recently acquired view. “It’s nice to see the sky from the computer lab,” said Taylor Langford, an undergraduate student in the program.

Another perk is that many of us will be getting more exercise on the stairs. You can choose to take the elevator, but waiting for it will still be a strenuous exercise—in patience. And once inside, alone with the sounds and the smells, you may begin to wonder if this was the first elevator Mr. Otis ever built. Most people make it safely to the fourth floor though, so perhaps it will hold out a few more years.

Ladies, if you have not yet used the facilities on our floor, prepare yourselves. Upon entering, you will see urinals on the wall—something that would make any woman stop, wide-eyed, then spin around and flee the scene, thinking that one of those horribly embarrassing nightmares had just come true and hoping nobody was there to witness it. Even after re-reading the signs, it still somehow feels like breaking the rules. And yes, that is “signs” plural. When we first moved in, there were two signs, one of which was a sheet of paper that had “Women” printed on it no less than five times.

We poke fun at Loew and Sieg, but it’s all in good humor. Loew served us well for many years; undergraduate student Daren Chaisy is not alone in saying, “I miss the basement.” And despite Sieg’s quirks, most students seem thrilled with HCDE’s new home. One student even suggested that we invent an HCDE mascot and name him Steven “SiegHall.” Faculty and staff are walking around with revived energy and more spring in their step, and students are exercising their newfound ability to open windows—those blessed, blessed windows—during class.

Besides, there is one very distinct advantage to being housed in Sieg Hall, commonly considered the ugliest building on campus. If we’re already in it, we never have to look at it!

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**postComm re:Design**

by Kyle Hurt

Congratulations to PhD student Matt Eliot, who won the contest to rename postComm! In the winter quarter, we asked students, faculty, and staff to submit ideas for a new name for postComm. After reviewing the submissions, we narrowed it down to eight names and asked everyone in the department to vote for their favorite. Of the 71 votes, 35 percent went to re:Design—more than double the number of votes for the runner up, Interface. Thank you to everyone who participated, and thank you to Matt for coming up with the winning name!
HCDE Open House

by Linet Henry

The Research Showcase and Open House, which this year celebrated the move to Sieg Hall and the new department name, was the most exciting and crowded research showcase to date. Three hundred people, two dogs, and one robot filled the top floors of Sieg Hall, talking, milling about, eating, and sitting in comfy sofas in the lounge with the windows open and the sunlight streaming in. Alumni, faculty, students, and guests wandered up and down the fourth-floor hall looking at posters and talking to researchers about their work. The dogs, one of which was an honorary alumnus, got lots of attention and probably some good table scraps too. The robot rolled about trying to find someone to talk to, but everyone was too busy looking at research posters or talking among themselves.

The robot, who wore an Arnold Schwarzenegger image on his video-screen face, is one of the 28 research projects that were represented. The robot’s project, which takes place in the Human Robot Communication Lab (HRCL), explores how humans talk to and interact with robots—not very much at a large happy party it seems—and this project is typical of the interdisciplinary nature of research in the HCDE department.

The unique nature of the HCDE department, with its core faculty from both hard and soft sciences, and its collaborative work with other departments, has led to a diverse range of research projects, from the application of interface design to improve the collection of medical information in the field to an exploration of how large Internet applications of interface design to improve communication skills, particularly in underserved populations.

Every project was thought-provoking, and all of the researchers were engaging. Here are some of the research groups represented:

• A group, directed by Jennifer Turms, is examining the details of creating personas to support effective user interface testing and asking the question, “What does it mean to keep the user in mind when designing?”

• A group, directed by Jan Spyridakis, is looking into what might happen if environmental policy documents, particularly Environmental Impact Statements, were written in plain language, and asking the question, “Does NEPA document quality make a difference?”

• The Digital Games Research Group, directed by Beth Kolko, is exploring how computer gaming affects information gathering and communication skills, particularly in underserved populations.

• The Communicative Practices in Virtual Workspaces Group, directed by Mark Zachry, is looking at “emergent uses of digital technologies to coordinate work activities.” Their poster was a visual representation of the relationship between various levels of contributors and editors in the Wikipedia community, as well as how they have developed their operating practices.

• The Human Centered Safety and Security Systems Research Group, directed by Mark Haselkorn, is investigating how to map economic corridors in developing countries.

But that was just upstairs. Downstairs, on the third floor, there were cool little rubber ducky key chains available at Charlotte Lee’s Computer Supported Collaboration (CSC) Lab, in which researchers “study the development and use of collaborative information systems in science and engineering.” And there was Julie Kientz’s Computing for Healthy Living and Learning (ChiLL) Lab, which had a Wii for visitors to work out on and some tips for using software to assist with healthy lifestyles. These researchers are exploring some very interesting issues around storing and retrieving educational and therapeutic information about autistic children.

Everyone at the open house and research showcase will have noticed that not only was the food delicious, but the wine and beer were free. The HCDE department throws a great party. ✨
PhD Student Thrives in Academia

by Jacob Warren

When PhD graduate Quan Zhou came to UWTC in 2003, he already knew his career path: Academia. Whereas most of the program’s students focus on the degree’s private sector appeal, Zhou felt that the intersection of technology and communication had fascinating potential for academic inquiry and discourse. Zhou, now an assistant professor of Technical Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, recently received a great honor: he was appointed a member of the 2009–2010 Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars Program. As a Wisconsin Teaching Fellow, Zhou will be granted $4,000 of research funding. This award was largely based on Zhou’s performance as a teacher.

Zhou believes UWTC prepared him for success as an academic. In particular, he credits the program’s interdisciplinary nature, its mixture of rhetoric, user centered design, usability, and HCI. Now a full-time professor and researcher, Zhou appreciates the experience he gained teaching both Technical Writing, as well as Web Design and Publishing, and participating in student research, studying information design, digital gaming, cell-phone usage, and usability through eye-tracking. He says the cutting-edge quality of his education made him more appealing to employers. When Zhou was applying for academic positions, Wisconsin-Stout was looking for someone who could bring their English department knowledge about information architecture and the relationship between culture and technology. Zhou’s TC training made him the ideal candidate.

Zhou knew UWTC had a lot to offer from researching other TC programs. He concluded that UWTC was “the best in the world” after seeing the variety of research opportunities that aligned with his interests and the numerous articles published by UWTC faculty.

Zhou came to UWTC with an editing and publishing Bachelor’s, and a journalism minor from Wuhan University, China. As a student, he showed many of the qualities of an academic. He considers himself an analytical person who continually strives to learn both practical and theoretical material, and wants to disseminate his knowledge to others. Dave Farkas, Zhou’s dissertation advisor, remembers his “amazing hunger for learning.” He recalls that Zhou wanted to learn everything the department had to offer and was a keen observer of American culture. He was particularly good at finding ways to travel on a tight budget.

Farkas and Zhou jointly started the QuikScan research group, which studies formatting techniques that make business documents easier to process. With his fellowship, Zhou is continuing QuikScan research at Wisconsin-Stout. He now focuses on how QuikScan formatting techniques can improve a student’s writing ability, collaboration skills, and aptitude for audience analysis.

Students who relate to Zhou’s personality and interests may also find themselves considering academia. Zhou advises such students to get teaching experience while still in school. Teaching experience enriches students’ credentials and helps them develop personal teaching philosophies. Aspiring academics should also pursue research, especially if they want to work at a research-oriented university like UW. They should also consider going outside the department to take courses from other programs. He believes courses in the liberal arts and humanities would also be beneficial, considering that most universities include technical communication in their English departments.

By Jacob Warren

Natasha Jones: Bitten by the Teaching Bug

Natasha Jones once planned on becoming a technical editor. Then, during her second semester of grad school, she taught a composition course, got “bitten by the teaching bug,” and continued teaching through the rest of her Master’s studies. Jones can’t see herself doing anything but teaching and is pursuing her PhD in HCDE with that purpose in mind.

What is it about teaching that she loves so much? Jones considers herself a people person and enjoys the interaction. But more importantly, she sees teaching as an opportunity to learn while inspiring others. Ultimately, she wants to know she is making a difference.

If you share Jones’s sentiments, academia might be the career for you. She has several pieces of advice for aspiring professors. First, be a teaching assistant in as many courses as possible. The hands-on experience is invaluable and makes you more comfortable with the role. In addition, get involved in ways that show your capacity for research and service: participate in research groups, serve on a scholarship committee, or work in the engineering writing center. The research, service, and teaching triad is appealing in applications for academic positions.

Give teaching a try and maybe, like Natasha, you’ll get bitten by the teaching bug.
Exploring the Human-Robot Relationship Through Film
Faculty lead: Sarah Kriz
Team members: Shalina Bajracharya, Linda Brooking, Ninad Dalal, Pallavi Damra, Toni Ferro, Alexis Hope Gottlieb, Evan Herbst, Sora Hong, Jessica Houston, Natalie Lindner, Xiang Ling, Trond Nilsen, Josh Polansky, John Porter, Alex Price, Chris Raleigh, Zhauntaliece Swenson, Jessica Wang

We analyze American films that feature robots in key roles. Our central focus is to use these films to evaluate how the human-robot relationship is commonly conceptualized in American society. The types of issues that are typically covered during our discussion sessions include the way in which robots are represented in relation to humans (friendly helper vs. dangerous super-human machine), the roles that robots play in society (servant vs. peer), the ethical issues inherent in the creation of robots, the style and manner of human-robot communication, the impact robots have on our understanding of humanness, and how these films shape our biases and expectations about the capabilities and behaviors of robots. In addition, we contrast the fictional representation of robots and their relationships with humans with real world robots and their roles in society.

Computer Supported Collaboration
Faculty lead: Charlotte Lee
Team members: Matthew Bietz, Alex Thayer

How do people use Google calendar for much more than meeting scheduling? How do scientists share and analyze massive amounts of genetic data? How do astronomers distributed across the globe work together to “see” through a telescope halfway around the world? How do rubber duck collectors collaborate to find out about new duck designs? These are just a few of the questions we have been studying.

The Computer Supported Collaboration (CSC) Lab conducts research to inform the design of information systems for collaboration in both work and leisure. We use primarily qualitative social science research methods, conducting interviews or observational fieldwork in places of work and leisure to holistically investigate information systems as evolving social and technical entities. Recently we have studied collaboration in environmental microbiology, functional brain imaging, museum exhibit design, and even hobbyist rubber duck collecting. We have two active research projects supported by the National Science Foundation to study the development of cyberinfrastructures, or large-scale computing systems, to support scientific research. We are also exploring a new project (with Professor Mark Zachry) to study how astronomers in multiple locations collaborate in the use of remote telescopes.

Design for Digital Inclusion
Faculty lead: Beth Kolko
Team members: Chad Driesbach, Erica Johnson, Cynthia Putnam, Rebecca Walton

We analyze existing data and are planning additional research for the Central Asia Information and Communication Technology project, a five-year longitudinal study of information and communication technology adoption and adaptation patterns in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. We are collaborating with faculty and students in Computer Science on the design of hardware and software to build a transportation information infrastructure, and we are developing a cellphone-based social networked information directory. This year, we submitted papers to the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, the Journal of Information Technology and International Development, the ACM/IEEE Conference on Information Technologies and Development, the IEEE IPCC conference, and the Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining Conference. We also displayed four posters at the UW Change poster event and submitted a National Science Foundation grant to do Washington-state based research that builds on our work from the past few years. We traveled to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, over spring break to conduct three research studies: usability tests of a tracking system for shared transportation, usability tests of a mobile social software application for mobile phones, and interviews to explore Internet users’ experiences and perceptions of information technology.

Designing Information Technology for Healthy Living
Faculty lead: Julie Kientz
Team members: Amanda Ahn, Renee Culala, Sajanee Halko, Jackie Holmes, Reshma Kooner, Andrey Maslov, Breanne Miller, Maureen Nash, Dawn Sakaguchi

Information technologies have a vast potential to enable individuals and families to improve the health of their lifestyles. Mobile technologies, persuasive technologies, and collaborative technologies can all support people in setting and achieving goals, such as a healthier diet, better record keeping for their health, and a sustainable lifestyle. We focus on these topics using a standard HCI design process by determining design requirements through qualitative evaluations, coming up with design concepts based on those requirements, developing prototypes of different concepts, and evaluating the prototypes with real users.

Communicative Practices in Virtual Workspaces
Faculty lead: Mark Zachry
Team members: Babi Velho Barreto, Katie Derfick, Toni Ferro, Marita Graube, Linda Le, Jonathan Morgan, Elly Searle

We investigate emergent uses of digital technologies to coordinate work activities. Specifically, we are concerned with developing knowledge about novel applications and integrating such technologies into organizations. Adopting and extending ideas from TC, HCI, and related fields, we use theoretical frameworks provided by activity theory, actor-network theory:

”How do rubber duck collectors collaborate to find out about new duck designs?”
theory, and genre ecologies, along with user research methods and discourse analysis, to explore communicative practices within online environments.

Much of our current research involves the study of Wikipedia as a novel online space where collaborative work gets done. Current projects include an exploration of how editor reputations could be visualized in order to assist users to more effectively judge the reputation of others; an analysis of the use of Wikipedia userboxes to better understand what sort of information about an editor could support effective collaboration; and a study of how Wikipedia policies, guidelines, and essays serve to regulate collaborative writing practices on Wikipedia talk pages. We are also writing up the results of a national survey to understand how publicly available online services support knowledge workers in the workplace. We plan to relaunch the survey to compare differences and adoption rates from year to year.

**Visualization and Analytics Research Group**

Faculty lead: Mark Haselkorn
Team members: Faria Bhatti, Pallavi Damara, Loraine Rohrback, James Wachai, Rebecca Walton, Kristin Wieben

We are working on a wide variety of projects linked by the use of geographical information system (GIS) displays for decision support. For example, one project involves three universities and multiple government organizations to identify and analyze factors that affect security at three sites along the U.S. border. Another project involves analyzing logistics needs during emergencies and partnering with World Vision International to improve emergency logistics services to field offices worldwide. Yet another project operates in partnership with Mercy Corps to map the value chains of six high-value commodities in Nepal. Additional work by this research group involves coordinating the work of the Pacific Rim Visualization and Analytics Center.

**Usability Evaluation of Windows Mobile Help**

Faculty lead: Karen Kasonic
Team members: Mike Berg, Doug Divine, Molly George, Calvin Kaiser, Alicia Kellogg, Brian Knudson, Erin Olman, James Wachai, Jacob Warren, Bob Watson, Cedric Wong

During spring quarter 2009, we conducted student-facilitated usability studies for a commercial client: Microsoft. Their own Theresa Goertz, the content publishing lead of the Windows Mobile team, requested that students evaluate the usability of Windows Mobile help systems. The results and recommendations of our study helped the content publishing team at Microsoft make redesign changes in anticipation of the release of Windows Mobile 6.1, the operating system’s latest release. To gather data, we brought participants into the HCDE LUTE (the old one beneath the engineering library) and conducted a variety of activities, which included card sorting, wants and needs analyses, and scenario-based task analyses. Our study was presented during the Undergraduate Research Symposium on May 15th, 2009.

We are presenting our work at the Research in Engineering Education Symposium in Australia in the summer 2009.

**Internet-Based Research Group (Intres)**

Faculty lead: Jan Spyridakis
Team members: Daren Chaisy, Elisabeth Cuddihy, Jaayden Halko, Saanjee Halko, Brett Masker, Kate Mobrand, Sella Rush

We study how various design features of online information (e.g., websites) affect users’ behavior, comprehension, and perceptions. Our research focuses on refining a user model that accounts for how comprehension and navigational behavior interact in digital environments. Our approach also accounts for how a user’s domain knowledge and demographics fit into the model.

We are proud to announce the creation of WebLabUX (go to http://depts.washington.edu/intres/drupal/node/7), a toolkit that dynamically generates alternative versions of a website, delivers them randomly to participants through the Internet, and collects survey results as well as users’ behavior with an information system. Our goal has been to study users interacting with information systems using their own computing environments at a time of their own choosing. This spring, we launched a remote, Internet-based study to compare the effect of display size and preview design on users’ comprehension, behavior, and perceptions. The team is presenting a paper at IPCC in Hawaii in July.

**The Plain Language Research Group**

Faculty lead: Jan Spyridakis
Team members: Katie Dentlich, Randy Dowell, Justin McDavid, Natasha Jones

The NEPA documents group is researching the effects of Plain Language guidelines on reader comprehension and perception of environmental impact statements. This spring they conducted a reading study of four versions of an IES (differing in heading format and pronoun presence) on 120 participants who came to the university, read one version, then answered comprehension, perceptual, and open-ended questions. The group is also doing focus group followup interviews. Results will be presented at IPCC 2009.
Making Lasagna
Instead of Spaghetti

by Devor Barton

As a student in David Farkas’ Information Design class, Noah Iliinsky began studying diagrams simply because the topic interested him. However, his interest turned into a Master’s thesis and eventually led to invitations for speaking engagements and other work as an expert on diagrams.

Iliinsky (pronounced eel-YIN-ski) didn’t initially pursue a course of study in usability or technical communication. He earned his BA in physics from Reed College in Portland, OR, while operating the campus nuclear reactor, then found employment as a programmer after graduating, but he always wanted to design things to make them better for people. After taking Jennifer Turner’s User-Centered Design course, Iliinsky wanted to learn more about usability and entered the UWTC Master’s program at the University of Washington. When he created some interesting diagrams in his Information Design class, Farkas asked him to do more on the subject. The topic interested Iliinsky, so he spent a quarter of independent study researching diagrams and applying concepts from other UWTC courses, eventually developing rules to identify what contributed to a diagram’s success or failure. Now, he thinks about this kind of work all the time.

Although he had written a thesis for his undergraduate degree, Iliinsky had not intended to write one for his graduate studies; he simply wanted to study diagrams because he had always been a visual thinker and enjoyed applying visual order, often creating diagrams for his own purposes. But Iliinsky was encouraged by others to pursue the idea as a thesis. Farkas became his thesis advisor and committee chair on the project, discussing ideas and raising questions while allowing Iliinsky to follow his own path. Farkas says, “Working with Noah was a pleasure. Once he started writing his thesis, the chapters came quickly and were in pretty good shape when I saw them.” The other members of the committee, Tom Williams and William Winn, also provided invaluable assistance. The thesis title itself, “How to Make Lasagna Instead of Spaghetti,” came out of a discussion with Farkas about the inadequacy of typical “spaghetti” diagrams, whereas Iliinsky prefers information in ordered layers, similar to lasagna.

Since beginning work on the thesis, Iliinsky has presented on the topic many times in various venues. The first time was as a poster at the 2005 Society for Technical Communication Showcase, then as a paper and presentation in the 2006 Showcase after his oral defense. He gave a presentation at InfoCamp in both 2007 and 2008, and presented at Foo Camp, BarCamp Seattle, and Ignite Seattle. Earlier this year, Iliinsky presented at a PSSIGCHI meeting and gave two presentations at VizThink. Following last year’s VizThink presentation, he was interviewed for a podcast webinar. In all of these presentations, Iliinsky hopes audience members take away an understanding of what makes diagrams more effective and what they can do to make better diagrams.

Anthro-Tech Sponsors Students to Attend UPA Conference

by Kyle Hurt

HCDE recently received a generous contribution for its students from local user-centered design consultancy, Anthro-Tech (www.anthro-tech.com). Anthro-Tech sponsored three students to attend the 2009 Usability Professionals Association (UPA) Conference in Portland, OR. Anthro-Tech Founder and Principal Consultant, Suzanne Boyd, who received her Master’s from UW, said the sponsorships were an opportunity to give back to the department that has helped her throughout her career, both as a student and professional. Anthro-Tech has hired and collaborated with several department graduates and faculty over the years.

As a student in Communication at UW, Boyd’s interest in user-centered design (UCD) peaked when she took Judy Ramey’s Usability Testing class (TC 517). When asked to teach in the department in 2001, Boyd saw it as an opportunity to bring a professional perspective to academia. She considers it an honor to teach the caliber of students who come through the department and values the contributions they bring to the classroom. “They bring their own stories, experiences and challenges,” she says. Her goal is to “leverage that knowledge and share strategies and tactics for UCD, so they can be more effective in practice.”

Boyd teaches UCD for the web and, this year, will be co-teaching with HCDE PhD candidate and Senior Associate at Anthro-Tech, Emma Rose. When asked about the department’s new name, Boyd expressed her support for the change, as it “places the focus on making technology and design work for people.” As a seasoned consultant, Boyd knows that is what the industry is all about.
Former Certificate Students Share Their Wisdom

by Catherine Treadgold

Good news if you’re looking for a job in TC: the later bird can still get the worm—given enough determination, a clever strategy, and exactly the right worm.

On February 3, a panel of seven former students from the UW Certificate Program in Technical Writing and Editing visited the current Technical Editing class to share their post-program experiences. This is the second year of what is becoming an annual event, thanks to lecturer Tracey Freel, who has taught technical editing for four years.

The panel of five men and two women discussed topics ranging from how to fine-tune a résumé to which companies are still hiring in a challenging market.

“Good news if you’re looking for a job in TC: the later bird can still get the worm—given enough determination, a clever strategy, and exactly the right worm.”

Jobs in the public sector still need good people, and jobs overseeing the environment need those who are both passionate about preserving the earth’s resources and skilled in editing and writing. “Dan Draheim and I are both in the environmental consulting arena,” said Audree DeAngeles, a freelance contractor. “Right now we have a lot of work. The companies targeted specifically have contracts that are federally and state mandated…. If you have any sort of environmental or biology background and if you’re a good editor and writer, there’s a demand.”

Travis Martin added, “These jobs can also be personally more rewarding.” Martin’s company, Tyler Technologies, adapts corporate software for the public sector.

A science background is not essential for working in scientific and other technical fields. Ian Bessler and Leann Plank are both musicians, and Greg Zura majored in Theater. Job seekers must learn to emphasize the advantages of their diverse backgrounds. For example, in his application materials and interview, Zura pointed to specific ways that acting skills enhanced his value as an employee, a strategy that landed him a job at Flow International.

Draheim, the first and only technical editor at the environmental consulting firm Brown and Caldwell, was hired despite a non-science background. “I stressed my strength in writing and language, because that’s what I know. Then I said, by the way, I also worked for an environmental land use law firm for twelve years. [Think of] any transferable skill, any background that you can spin. If you’re shifting from one industry to another, you’ve got to find some little foothold. Otherwise it’s a lot harder.”

After an intense, two-month search, Draheim ended up with three offers, all in environmental consulting. He believes his carefully tailored and crafted résumés and cover letters secured the interviews. “I made every last word exactly right, made everything as specific as possible to the position and the company,” he said.

Jobs in the private sector still exist for the persistent. Thad deJesus, a content editor for Expedia, spoke of the decline in online marketing positions: “From my experience, it’s going to be a tough road, given the current economic climate.” Don’t be discouraged, he added, because tougher, more competitive candidates who market themselves intelligently are bound to prevail.

When interviewing candidates, deJesus looks for qualities that “show versatility and flexibility…how you were able to acquire specific skills when necessary. People are being asked to wear a lot of hats…. Also, a good attitude goes a long way.”

In DeAngeles’ experience, all qualifications being equal, candidates who fit into the company’s “culture” will stand out: “Will they stress people out or smoothly transition into part of the team?” To determine if you’re a good fit for a company, she advises talking to current employees and studying the website.

Panelists expressed universal praise for the UW Certificate Program, where about 25 students complete two courses per quarter, two evenings a week over the course of an academic year. Bessler, who parlayed his background as a guitarist and magazine journalist into a job writing manuals for musical equipment at Behringer International, found the program helpful “across the board—everything we learned in Jan’s [style] class, everything about software.”

Zura added, “In Tracey’s editing class, I learned a lot about diplomacy with writers and subject matter experts—how to talk with them and extract what you need, and how to understand what they want to get across.”

Bessler’s employer “was a product of the Communications Department. She knew about this program, so for her, it did turn a light on. It helps! It shows that you’re serious and that you are interested and committed to this field.”

DeAngeles added, “It opens up a conversation. They’ll see [your certificate] on your résumé—”

“At the very top!” Freel interrupted. “We’re putting education at the top now.”

DeAngeles continued, “And they will say, ‘Tell me about the program. What did you learn?’”

“Graduates of the Certificate Program in Technical Writing and Editing share their post-program experiences with current students.”
Sandy Bartell

My dissertation research involves an exploratory study examining some of the sociocultural and linguistic variables that might affect the credibility of online medical information.

These days I am looking forward to two things: (a) the day I will be able to wear my funny little medieval cap at Husky Stadium and (b) getting back to fishing, camping, scuba diving, skydiving, and taking lots of naps.

Colin Birge

I’m working with Beth Kolko on the intersection of security, privacy, and usability of interaction design, especially in mobile computing scenarios. I’ve also worked with Jennifer Turns on questions about engineering and design education.

Of all the things I enjoy most about living in Seattle, I appreciate the fact that it’s been over 20 years since I’ve fallen into a prickly pear cactus.

Elisabeth Cuddihy

My research includes engineering and design education, empirical investigation of information design, and Internet-based methods for studying user behavior on informational websites. Before coming to UW HCDE, I worked in artificial intelligence and intelligent user interfaces. I came to this program because the quirkiness of people’s intelligence is much more interesting.

I am an annual supporter of the Seattle International Film Festival, and I am a big fan of video games.

Zhiwei Guan

I am interested in studying how people communicate through technologies, such as online chat and online community. My areas of expertise are quantitative and qualitative user research, specifically using eye tracking and rich statistical analysis techniques. In my PhD dissertation, I am investigating the design and usability of online social systems, as well as the validity of usability approaches. In particular, I am studying how community technologies affect, shape, and promote people’s social needs. I am using a combination of ways including surveys, interviews, and eye tracking to study how people use Facebook to promote their friend association.

I am the mother of a 7-month-old little boy. I am learning to find the balance between study and family. My biggest wish is to finish my dissertation soon!

Kathleen Gygi

While I spent almost a year as a PhD student on leave to be with my husband and dog in New Mexico, I hope to finish this summer. My research includes the epistemology of practice, international technical communication, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. I have investigated professional practice in diverse domains, including community-based researchers, designers, engineering educators, post-secondary teachers, and software engineers. My dissertation involves an ethnographic case study of coding practices in credit-based collaborative research groups. This year has been an intensive period of reflecting, taking stock, and creative positioning, and last November, I was extremely fortunate to participate in the doctoral symposium at the Computer Supportive Cooperative Work conference in San Diego. One of my goals is to challenge the ideas of where learning and knowledge creation occur. My ongoing work with Jennifer Turns and the Lab for User Centered Engineering Education has helped me position my dissertation in the scholarship of teaching and learning. I have pursued topics of security, privacy, and usability of interaction design, especially in mobile computing scenarios.

Natasha N. Jones

I am interested in the cultural aspects of TC and how TC can help empower and educate underrepresented minorities and marginalized communities. Most recently, I have become interested in the rhetoric and discourse of cyber social movements, and how information technologies have influenced changes in traditional social movements.

I love watching movies (NOT films), reading very unacademic novels (like Stephen King), and being silly with family and friends (by silly I mean the goofy laughing until I’m crying kind of silly). Though I want to go into academia, I don’t ever want it to take over my life. I never want to be one of those academics who sits around and talks about scholarship and theory over beer on Friday nights. I want my leisure time to be as mindless as possible!

Steve Lappenbusch

My research focuses on understanding how users in non-traditional work (law enforcement, humanitarian relief, etc.) combine or recombine different technologies to create emergent, user-generated systems to make sense of and accomplish their work. More importantly, the research seeks to understand how those user-generated systems can impact success in systems implementations. For example, humanitarian users in the field will choose to use Groove for document development and Skype for communication, but HQ users will use simple email attachments for document development and face-to-face, email, or the phone for communication. These two different sets of choices coalesce into different systems that map roughly to distinct user groups. Often the different systems are in some ways incompatible, so when users from different systems attempt to communicate or work together, systemic complications arise. Understanding how to identify, analyze, and suggest solutions is the core of my research.

"I use the intellectual tools I gained at UW almost daily."
I live in Portland, OR, with my wife and two children. They’re awesome. I work for the LexisNexis Advanced Government Solutions Group. I wear many hats but spend a lot of time onsite with customers doing needs analysis, training, and workflow documentation and analysis in investigative government agencies. Many colleagues think working with law enforcement is the most exciting part of our jobs, but my favorite is child support enforcement. I use the intellectual tools I gained at UW almost daily: seeing larger patterns in user behavior, analyzing data, and accounting for my audience when presenting results, uncovering systemic issues, and helping systems designers and management understand the importance of users’ experiences. Government users are not used to anyone advocating for them when it comes to the technology they use to do their jobs, so I often receive a warm welcome.

Jerrod Larson

I am working on a project to design an environmental impact labeling system for semidurable and durable consumer goods. The label is meant to indicate the life-cycle costs of a product, including its materials, manufacturing, use, and eventual disposal. This project includes several threads, including empirical research into how people interpret certain rating symbols and environmental phrases.

When not at school or work, I’m dreaming of Kauai (which I do at work and school sometimes too).

Kate Mobrand

I am very pleased to be back pursuing my third degree from UW HCDE program. My MS thesis work here with Professor Jan Spyridakis focused on text comprehension in the online environment and the adaptation of print-based signaling strategies to writing for the web, as well as the use of Internet-based research methods to assess users interacting with materials from their natural environments. In my current PhD research with Dr. Spyridakis, I am combining these past interests with a new focus on pedagogical and communication issues in a centralized service course. I have the distinct pleasure of working with our talented graduate students who deliver these technical writing and oral presentation classes to undergraduates in the College of Engineering and related fields.

Some favorite UW moments of mine include studying in the reading room in Suzzallo, strolling through the quad early in the evening when the cherry trees are in bloom, soaking in the energy on the first day of autumn quarter each year, attending a former student’s naval graduation ceremony, and getting my BS from UW the same day that my son did.

Jonathan T. Morgan

I am affiliated with Dr. Sarah Kriz’s Human-Robot Communication Laboratory (HRCL), Dr. Mark Zachry’s Communicative Practices in Virtual Workspaces research group, and the Design, Use, Build group (DUB). My interests include human-computer interaction, computer-mediated communication (especially in cooperative online settings), and machine learning. I am working on several research projects concerned with how Wikipedia editors talk to and interact with one another online, and how their discourse and behaviors might reflect their cultural identities, implicit motivations, roles, and values. My work with the HRCL involves similar considerations in a different genre: how does the way people interact with a robot reveal their expectations and assumptions for robotic behavior?

In my (ever-diminishing) spare time, I am a voracious and omnivorous reader, and an enthusiastic singer and guitar player. I also enjoy a good game of racquetball.

Cynthia Putnam

After earning my MSTC, I began my dissertation investigating how design teams leverage user experience (UX) research, concentrating on two common encapsulation/communications tools: personas and scenarios. I hope to identify variables that affect how useful, actionable, and usable these tools are from the perspective of design team members. Other research interests include investigating information technologies for resource-constrained environments. As a research assistant, I have investigated technology proliferation and use in Central Asia. Additionally, working with a team of researchers who have ideated several tenable technology products and services, I have identified specific user requirements for those concepts through quantitative methods (statistical analysis of a broad social survey) combined with qualitative research (design ethnography and structured interviews). I am also interested in investigating method modifications needed when conducting UX research for people with cognitive disabilities, concentrating specifically on people with autism. User interface design is another area of interest, specifically, exploring alternative user interface design and interaction, including the use of 3D space. As part of my MSTC, I investigated alternative shopping experiences that promoted serendipitous findings; I used Amazon.com as my prototype mockup for usability.

I love baseball and beer, only barely better than biking.

Emma J. Rose

My general research interests are in human computer interaction and designing for digital inclusion. I am looking at the particular challenges for resource-constrained populations and how these challenges can be accounted for within the design process. Past projects included looking at the role of mobile phones as a tool to overcome barriers of everyday life in Kyrgyzstan. My dissertation research will focus on the use and design of technology in delivering social services in Washington State.

I’ve taken the last couple quarters off to embark on a project almost as challenging as the PhD: that is parenthood. Oliver was born in November 2008 and is keeping me smiling and sleepy.

Rebecca Walton

My research interests center on information and communication technology for development (ICTD), particularly information systems design and process improvement. My research has involved designing systems for international humanitarian and nonprofit organizations, focusing on human and contextual factors that affect project success and design strategies to support decision-making at multiple levels. I am primarily a qualitative researcher with extensive field experience, having designed and participated in research projects in regions including Africa, Central Asia, and the United States. My research experience involves ICTD projects to support public health, microfinance, and emergency logistics.

I’ll be lucky enough to travel to Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Bolivia, Myanmar, Turkey, Sweden, and Denmark this year for research and conferences. The only thing better than traveling is coming home again.

Kejun Xu

I am specializing in information architecture and UX research at UW HCDE. My focus is on user interface information architecture and website localization and internationalization. I received my MS in technical communication and information design at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), and I also hold the China National Certificate of Interpreting, Advanced Level. My involvement in LUTE (Laboratory for Usability Testing and Evaluation) at UW and UTEC (Usability Testing and Evaluation Center) at IIT give me a clear notion of user-centered design. By employing various user research methods—e.g., lab-based usability studies, field studies, heuristics—I am obsessed with the delicacies, challenges, excitement, and fulfillment that usability testing, user research, and interactive design bring to me.

I am a big fan of traveling, sleeping, cheesecake, and chocolate!
Imagine a day without your cell phone and all the things it does for you. Your phone allows you to check movie times, update your status on Twitter or Facebook, or text a friend “hello.” While we can do these activities daily, many countries are still building their Internet, let alone their mobile Internet. And while we enjoyed our spring break, Associate Professor Beth Kolko took ten people, including members of her research group, Design for Digital Inclusion (DDI), to Kyrgyzstan. There, they successfully conducted three research projects incorporating interviews, usability testing, and technical deployments. The projects were a transit project (Starbus), a mobile information directory project, and a project to better understand why large segments of the population choose not to use the Internet.

Kolko received the Central Asia Information and Communication Technologies (CAICT) Grant in 2003 from the National Science Foundation. The grant was originally for five years, but Kolko received a no-cost-extension year for the grant.

“We are focused on Central Asia because they are still at an early adoption stage,” says Kolko. “Many people are seeing and using these technologies for the first time.”

Rebecca Walton, an HCDE PhD student who went on the trip, adds, “We used interviews, design ethnographies, surveys, and usability tests to conduct our research. It's about how people adopt and adapt technology.”

The Starbus project was a collaboration with another research group from CSE, led by Professor Gaetano Boriello. The Starbus project is a grassroots transportation information service. It includes a student-built GPS/GSM module to track buses, an algorithm that predicts when the bus will reach its next destination, and server software so users can find out bus arrival times via a text message. “We conducted feasibility and usability testing to make sure getting this information through SMS was easy and useful,” says Walton. Students also conducted interviews with bus riders and drivers. The group also conducted a technical deployment of the system to see how it worked with the infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan; they discovered a variety of different technical issues, and the trip included some outings to run around the city looking for capacitors and resistors to reengineer the Starbox. Lecturer Ruth Anderson, undergraduate Anthony Poon, and former CSE student Waylon Brunette were part of the team that went to Bishkek.

The next project was the MoSoSo (Mobile Social Software) Directory, which gives users access to business reviews through their phones. The software was developed by HCDE PhD student Cynthia Putnam, based on research from the group over the years, including work by HCDE PhD student Emma Rose. Users can either access a main directory or create one to share with their friends. “It’s nice to have this information available,” says Kolko, “but what makes it better is that you can share your directory and make recommendations to people you trust, like friends and family.” Political science PhD student Erica Johnson assisted with both the Starbus and the MoSoSo project, and UW graduate and former CAICT RA Odina Salikhbaeva joined the group in Bishkek as well, traveling from Uzbekistan to provide research assistance.

The last project was part of a continuing quest to understand why people don’t use the Internet, even when it is available. Most studies of non-use focus on the expense or availability of Internet use. For this interview study, conducted by Walton and HCDE student Chad Driesbach, the team focused on talking to people who do use the Internet but who have family and friends who don’t use it. Walton explains, “We wanted to understand people’s usage and perceptions of the Internet. People think they don’t need it or it’s too slow.” Kolko adds, “We also interviewed them about people in their lives who don’t use the Internet and asked, ‘Why haven’t you introduced it to someone else?’ Since people often learn about new things through their social network, we wanted to talk to people who have members in their network who don’t use the technology to understand why the people who do use the technology don’t think it’s important enough to introduce into others’ lives.” Walton and Driesbach were assisted on their project by a Master’s student from Israel, Aidai Seidakmatova.

Now that the team is back, Walton is focusing on the qualitative research and comparing the interviews about what people do online. Putnam is working on the directory software, and the Starbus project leaders are talking to other funders to expand the concept to different countries. As for Kolko, she’s still busy with this project: “The Central Asia project had a really productive year. I am excited about looking at the rich data and sharing our findings.”

In closing, Kolko says of the trip: “It was a really great opportunity for the students who have been working on the project to get their hands dirty and experience the difficulties and excitement of doing onsite research.” Walton adds, “We want people to think more deeply about the connections between culture and technology usage. Technologies are not the same everywhere. Even if there is Internet/mobile, people do not use it the same way.”
“Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” These eloquent words by Hellen Keller have influenced the life of Matt Shobe, an MSTC alum and very successful entrepreneur. Since graduating, Shobe has made his way from the central Usability Group at Microsoft to his current position as a Senior User Experience Designer at Google, leaving in his wake a string of startup companies that certainly cannot be called ‘nothing.’ As Shobe’s LinkedIn page reads, “myself and three other colleagues... created, nurtured (and in some cases, survived) various Internet startups in Chicago.” This spring, the College of Engineering recognized Shobe’s accomplishment with a Diamond Award in the “Early Career” category.

The College of Engineering Diamond Award recognizes the outstanding achievements, ingenuity, and entrepreneurship of all engineers. HCDE, one of the smallest departments in the College of Engineering, has been honored with two Diamond Awards in two years; BSTC alum Donna Sakson won a Diamond Award in 2008 for Distinguished Service.

Although Shobe’s award is for “Early Career” achievement, he already has over ten years of career experience tackling design and ease-of-use challenges in web-software design. In his own words, Shobe’s mission is “to create enticing yet hassle-free user experiences through observant evaluation and design.”

One of Shobe’s first designs was called Spyonit, a web-based alerting service that Yahoo! Magazine ranked in the “Top 50 Most Useful Sites” in July of 2000. Spyonit provided seeds for concepts that ultimately launched FeedBurner, the latest and most famous startup of which Shobe was officially named Co-Founder and Chief Design Officer.

FeedBurner provides tools for everyone from individual bloggers to major media outlets, letting them measure their audience, then distribute and earn money from their content published online. Its purpose is to make feed-based content more accessible to end users and more effective for the publishers that provide it. Shobe is deeply committed to cultural value in his business, and it shows. As stated on his LinkedIn page, he “maintains an unwavering devotion to the FeedBurner fan club. If publishers and advertisers want it, his team brandishes the t-squares and slide rules required to make it happen.” He himself continually communicates with FeedBurner’s million-plus publisher base, providing technical support, giving advice, and conducting interviews.

FeedBurner was acquired by Google in June 2007, but Shobe’s ‘daring adventure’ doesn’t stop there. Shobe continues to work with Google, spearheading various efforts to incorporate the key parts of FeedBurner’s capabilities into the Google product mix. He has also earned his FAA pilot’s license and completed the Chicago Marathon—twice! According to Shobe, “FeedBurner’s success has inspired a few others here in Chicago to try to make their own startup plans and execute them in the Midwest, realizing that you don’t absolutely have to be in the Valley to build a web-based product that makes people happy and has a daily impact on their lives.”

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NCTE Honors Mark Zachry

by Sophia Fong

“I was thrilled!” That’s how associate professor Mark Zachry felt when he learned that a collection of essays he co-edited with Western Michigan professor Charlotte Thralls would be honored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). NCTE offers awards in many fields including technical and scientific communication, within which are six categories with one work chosen for each category every year. This last fall, Zachry found out that his work was nominated and was chosen for the category of “Best Original Collection of Essays in Technical or Scientific Communication” for 2008.

The collection, entitled Communicative Practices in Workplaces and the Professions: Cultural Perspectives on the Regulation of Discourse and Organizations, was published in 2007 as a 12-chapter book. Many prominent authors were invited to contribute original research, including JoAnne Yates, Wanda Orlikowski, Catherine Schryer, and Clay Spinuzzi. The project took five years from start to publication but was well worth the time and effort. Zachry received this prestigious award at the March 2009 Association of Teachers of Technical Writing conference in San Francisco.
Information Design Class Goes Green

by Kyle Hurt

The mayor of Lake Forest Park (LFP) recently issued a proclamation acknowledging the contribution of HCDE students to LFP’s environmental outreach efforts. These are the students in the evening Master’s program who were enrolled during winter quarter in Professor Dave Farkas’ course Information Design (TC 510). In part because of Environmental Protection Agency regulations, LFP needed a wide range of educational documents to explain and promote good environmental practices, in particular preventing pollution from stormwater runoff.

As it happens, Farkas is a member of the LFP Environmental Quality Commission, and he volunteered his class when the city was wrestling with the problem of acquiring the needed material. The students produced booklets, brochures, posters, engineering fact sheets, web pages for the LFP website, self-running PowerPoint presentations, and more. Sammy the Salmon and Artie the Raindrop show up in activity booklets for K–6 students.

Within weeks of receiving the completed documents, the City of Lake Forest Park distributed some of the materials at its Earth Smart Fair in the Towne Centre, with up to 800 in attendance. According to the city’s website, “The materials were amazingly helpful and will be used in future events to promote stormwater quality awareness.” Many of the documents are available for download from the site. In addition, LFP is now distributing brochures to local businesses and will soon be working with science teachers in the LFP schools. Because the students submitted source files as well as ready-to-print PDF files, the documents can be readily updated and shared with other communities.

For more information, visit http://www.cityoflfp.com/city/engineering/stormwater/default.html#residents. Scroll down to “2009 Earth Smart Fair—Stormwater and NPDES” to see a list of documents available for download.

posTComm Wins Merit Award

by Jonathan Morgan

The Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) recognized the 2008 issue of posTComm with a ‘Merit’ award for demonstrating a commendable level of technical communication competence in the publication category.

Every year, STC solicits submissions from academic institutions and industry professionals of works representative of the field. Submissions are judged in a peer review forum, and awards are given based on the merits of the individual work. Judges volunteer their time to evaluate entries based on criteria including writing, graphics, copyedits, and organization.

The 2009 STC Competition Showcase saw entries from big local names such as Boeing and Microsoft and a variety of smaller companies, as well as HCDE. Several members of the 2008 posTComm team attended the showcase to present the latest issue this year—the fourth year in a row that posTComm has been recognized by STC. However, while manning the posTComm booth, project manager Jonathan Morgan found himself fielding as many questions about the department’s name change as about the magazine itself. This can be seen as evidence of the STC community’s high level of interest in HCDE, and bodes well for re:Design’s chances of continuing its run to a fifth straight year!

2008 posTComm team: project manager Jonathan T. Morgan; writers and editors Shalina Bajracharya, Juliana Chaumette, Sarah Jamaludin, Amy Monroe, Julia Ricketts, and Eliot Yamaguchi; contributing writers Amanda Ahn, Maggie Bardacke, and Kirsten Gantenbein; “In the Real World” editor Devor Barton; and advisers Kate Long and Judy Ramey.
HCDE Awards
compiled by Sophia Fong

Students
Katie Derthick
Max E. Gellert Fellowship in Engineering

Hannah Getachew
Sakson Diversity Scholarship
NSBE Turner Construction Scholarship

Natasha Jones
Society of Women Engineers Outstanding Student Award

Phun Lang
Sakson Diversity Scholarship
Society of Women Engineers Outstanding Student Award

Theresa Maramba
PEMCO Foundation Scholarship

Kejun Xu
STC International Award

Alumni
Matt Shobe
2009 College of Engineering Early Career Diamond Award

Faculty and Staff
Cynthia Atman
2009 David B. Thorud Leadership Award

Gian Bruno
College of Engineering Community of Innovators Award

Mark P. Haselkorn
Visual Analytics Pioneer Award

Mark Zachry
2008 NCTE Award for Excellence in Technical and Scientific Communication, Best Original Collection of Essays in Technical or Scientific Communication

On the Road...
by Kate Long

HCDE’s student travel fund helps reimburse expenses for students traveling to present at conferences. The following students received travel stipends in the past academic year.

Lorna Chong (Evening MS): $500 for ASSETS (ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility)

Katie Derthick (MS): $500 for International Professional Communication Conference (IPCC)

Matt Eliot (PhD): $500 for Computer-Human Interaction (CHI) Conference

Marita Graube (MS): $500 for Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) Conference

Kathleen Gygi (PhD): $500 for Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) Conference; $200 for CSCW Conference

Jaayden Halko (GNM): $500 for IPCC

Iрини Spyridakis (MS): $500 for IPCC

Sajane Halko (PhD): $500 for IPCC

Natasha Jones (PhD): $500 for Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

Cynthia Putnam (PhD): $500 for ASSETS

Ramsey Tesdell (MS): $500 for Digital Media & Learning Competition Winner’s Showcase at HASTAC III

Alex Thayer (BS, MS and PhD in fall 2009): $500 for IPCC

Robert Watson (MS): $500 for IPCC

Kejun Xu (PhD): $500 for Association for Business Communication (ABC) Conference

Congratulations HCDE Graduates!

Bachelor of Science
Soyo Ahn
Shalina Bajracharya
Chris Brooks
Francis Cortez
Renae Culala
David Hanson
James Humphrey III
Calvin Kaiser
Alicia Kellogg
Reshma Kooner
Taylor Langford
Natalie Kay Lindner
Dwight Joseph Lyle
Theresa Maramba
Katherine Nguyen
Niklas Patrick Nordlof
Eric Nordlund
Cyril Tiglao
Cedric Wong
Michelle Yee

Master of Science
Brandi Arnold
Devor Barton
Michael Berg
Jennifer Becker
Juliana Mione Chaumette
Charles Claxton
Ryan Collier
David Dye
Randy Dowell
Marita Graube
Kyle Hurt
Kenneth Ray Jelinek
Brett Masker
Breanne Miller
Amy Monroe
Angela Moulton
Yana Myaskovetskaya
Garrett Nakamoto
Loraine Renee Rohrback
Sella Rush
Yasmeen Sharlicia Sands
Eliy Searle
Carol Taylor
Ramsey Tesdell
David Thompson
James Wachai
Robert Watson
James Williams

Doctor of Philosophy
Kathleen Gygi
After being chair of UWTC for 11 years, it would seem like Judy Ramey would prefer her year-long sabbatical to be filled with relaxation and hard-earned quiet time. Ramey, however, doesn’t seem to be able to slow down. “My term ended July 31st, and August 1st I was on an airplane to England,” she said. During her sabbatical, Ramey traveled through England, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, and Peru.

After visiting friends and historical sites in England, Ramey went to Enschede in The Netherlands, where she spent two months visiting HCDE’s sister department at the University of Twente. “I had a great time. I talked to students and visited with all the faculty,” she said. She also had the opportunity to give a couple of presentations. At the University of Twente, she talked about the mobile user experience, and in Utrecht, for STIC (the national Dutch chapter of the Society of Technical Communication), she talked about the future of technical communication. She also went to the University of Antwerp in Belgium, where she talked about usability testing.

In September, Ramey attended the Mobile Human Computer Interaction (HCI) conference in Amsterdam and took the opportunity to visit friends in nearby cities. Even with friends, she kept busy. “I went on an all-day bicycle trip. Enschede is close enough to Germany that we set off in Holland, had lunch in Germany, and ended the afternoon back in Holland. That was great,” said Ramey. While there, Ramey also had the chance to take a few Dutch lessons.

After Holland, Ramey continued traveling through several cities along the west coast of France and toured chateaus including one, she pointed out, that was the last home of Leonardo Da Vinci. While in Bordeaux, Ramey watched the 2008 presidential elections over the Internet. She continued down to Spain, studying some Spanish in Madrid and visiting several other cities including Seville.

“I came back on December 15th, just in time for the Seattle blizzard,” Ramey recalled. She has been busy ever since. In early April, she attended the CHI conference in Boston, where she was able to attend a mobile user experience workshop. “I had a great time. It was a really good conference,” she said.

In April, Ramey went to Peru for two weeks on a trip organized by Global Partnerships, a Seattle organization that funds micro-finance organizations. While in Peru, she was able to meet management teams of two different micro-finance organizations, as well as some micro-loan recipients. During her trip, Ramey also visited Cuzco and Machu Picchu.

Beyond her extensive travels, Ramey also has been working on several projects. She worked with two former students on an article about mobile HCI, specifically focusing on mobile web. The article will be published in the International Journal of Mobile HCI in October 2009. Ramey also authored workshop papers with former students for both the Mobile HCI conference and the CHI conference. Currently, she is working with colleague Dennis Wixon of Microsoft on a book about usability engineering.

Ramey’s sabbatical ends September 15th, and she plans to remain busy. In addition to working on her book and preparing for next year’s classes, she is planning to put some time into her garden at home and do some cooking.

Next year, Ramey will teach usability testing while also managing several components of the HCDE program including the speaker series, the internship program, and LUTE. Speaking about her sabbatical, Ramey says she feels renewed and excited. “It’s been very stimulating. It’s been very busy but a different kind of busy….”
Staff Updates
by Kate Long

There have been some big changes in HCDE, and that holds true for the staff side of the house as well. The department welcomed Julianna Jones as Assistant to the Chair in December 2008. Jones brought UW administrative experience and an art background to her position as Jan Spyridakis’ assistant. She also brought a graceful sense of style, which has come in very useful when making design and aesthetic decisions in our new space! Kate Long moved to yet another position and is now the department’s Publication Coordinator. She has been very busy with the new name and new location. Gian Bruno and Maggie Bardacke, HCDE’s advising team, have been shepherding in the new curricular changes and helping students navigate all that UW has to offer. Jeff Babauta and Susan Raub continue to work hard to keep HCDE on track financially—not an easy task in these financial times. Secretary Carolynda Valerio-Lucas and student assistants Albert Kang and Mohamoud Mohamed are the hub of the HCDE main office. Thank you, HCDE staff!

Part-Time Lecturers
by Kate Long

HCDE thanks our guest lecturers for their contributions in the 2008–2009 academic year!

**Autumn 2008**
Jennifer Blackburn of Click User Experience, Lecturer for TC 517 Usability Testing
Tracey Freel of Pen to Paper, Affiliate Lecturer for TC 401 Style in Scientific and Technical Writing and TC 422 Introduction to Style in Technical Communication
Tina Loucks-Jaret of UW Engineering Dean’s Office, Affiliate Lecturer for TC 421 Introduction to Technical Communication
Kate Mobrand of UW Engineering Communication Program, Lecturer for TC 597 Approaches to Teaching Technical Communication
Charles Sheaffer, Lecturer for TC 333 Advanced Technical Writing and Oral Presentation
Karen Kurt Teal of UW Law School, Affiliate Lecturer for TC 333 Advanced Technical Writing and Oral Presentation and TC 400 Scientific and Technical Communication

**Winter 2009**
Tracey Freel of Pen to Paper, Affiliate Lecturer for TC 423 Introduction to Editing
Jim Kramer, Lecturer for TC 424 The Computer in Technical Communication (with Alex Thayer)
Ulrike Irmler of Windows International, Affiliate Lecturer for TC 512 International Technical Communication
Mark Polyak of Veratect Corporation, Lecturer for TC 598 Special Topics
Alex Thayer of Microsoft, Affiliate Lecturer for TC 424 The Computer in Technical Communication (with Jim Kramer) and TC 521 Seminar: Current Issues in Technical Communication

**Spring 2009**
Chris Holstrom of Google, Lecturer for TC 426 Introduction to Computer Software User Assistance
Pamela Johnson, Lecturer for TC 427 Production Design and Visual Media
Kelly Page (née Showalter), Lecturer for TC 412 Print Production
Arba Sey of UW Information School, Lecturer for TC 505 Computer-Assisted Communication

Record Year for Grants and Contracts
by Devor Barton

HCDE received a record amount of funding this year from grants and contracts. Over $1 million has come from extramural sources for research projects conducted by faculty and students. To quote HCDE Administrator Jeff Babauta, “Our research efforts have been highly successful.” These resources are advancing knowledge and supporting UW’s educational mission by facilitating research in topics such as national security, the development of Information Technology in Central Asia, social translucence in Socially Mediating Technologies, and the effectiveness of creating portfolios as a learning tool for engineering students. Additionally, the department finances an average of 13 research positions per quarter. Grants and contracts from proposals prepared by department faculty and staff and submitted to a peer review. Due to the stringent national competition, it is an honor to receive these awards. Most funding is provided by federal sources like the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. UW receives more federal funds for science and engineering than any other public institution, and has been among the top five federally funded research institutions for 25 years. HCDE is helping keep UW on top. The economy may be experiencing a downturn, but as Babauta points out, “We have more funded research than ever before.”
HCDE Welcomes Cindy Atman

by Catherine Treadgold

The UW engineering faculty has up-to-the-minute knowledge of the most effective classroom techniques, thanks to Professor Cindy Atman and her colleagues at the Center for Engineering Learning & Teaching (CELT).

Atman moved to HCDE from Industrial Engineering in January, 2009. The change was natural for Atman, whose doctoral thesis was titled, Network Structures as a Foundation for Risk Communication. “In my academic growing-up, I was already doing research on communication,” she says. “The focus in HCDE is on design and the user. I do research on design processes, and the users are people learning to do design. So there are a lot of reasons why there’s synergy between me and my HCDE colleagues—our research methodologies and the way we look at problems.”

Atman is no stranger to honors and distinctions. Most recently she received the UW David B. Thorud Leadership Award. Besides being named a fellow of both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Society for Engineering Education, she is the first appointee to the new Mitchell T. Bowie and Leila Blanche Bowie Endowed Chair.

Atman was recruited from Pittsburgh in 1998 to direct CELT, but she also directs the Center for the Advancement of Engineering Education (CAEE)—a $12 million grant funded by NSF since 2003. Although UW oversees the grant, the funding is shared with four engineering schools: Stanford, Howard University, Colorado School of Mines, and Minnesota/Purdue. Using surveys, interviews, and design tasks, the five schools tracked 160 students from freshman year to graduation. Surveys were also completed by 5,000 students at 24 other institutions.

CELT receives some funding from CAEE and benefits from CAEE’s valuable data. Although their goals and activities overlap, CAEE and CELT are distinct. In September, CELT will begin its tenth year, with no end in sight. The CAEE grant ends in December, which will allow Atman to return to teaching.

CELT’s mission is to collect data on engineering education and counsel the UW engineering faculty on classroom technique. News of success has spread, and Atman responds to a steady stream of requests to present papers and lead workshops.

Faculty development is handled by Jim Borgford-Parnell, CELT’s assistant director and instructional consultant since 2005. Borgford-Parnell counsels teachers on how to engage students more actively. CELT’s reputation is such that one of his recent workshops took place in Taiwan.

The challenge facing all engineering programs is how to balance learning fundamentals, such as the concepts of statics and dynamics, with actual designing. Far too often students get bogged down by core requirements and drop out. A school’s success in ferrying students through to graduation can hinge on how early and skillfully they integrate the creative with the nitty-gritty.

(continued on page 20)
“The question is how?” Atman says. “You can’t ignore the analysis part. You really hope the engineers who built the bridge you drive over got the load calculations correct. If not, you’re the one who plummets into the river…. So what I’m passionate about is two major things: one is trying to figure out how to teach engineers to think broadly before they get into analysis, and the other is to help our engineering faculty teach all the aspects of the engineering curriculum better.”

One of the ways she and her team study design processes is through scenarios. Freshmen, seniors, and professionals are observed designing a playground or finding solutions to Midwest flooding or dangerous crosswalks. The good news is that seniors perform better than freshmen; however, they often overlook disability and safety, which means they fall short of professional standards. Findings from these studies will soon be published on a CELT website.

Simply sharing results of these experiments alerts many students to the importance of pondering the task at hand before diving in headfirst. As one student put it, “Pick your head up from the paper and analyze the problem.” The hope is that every engineering student will experience a similar burst of insight before collecting a diploma.

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**Bucky to the Rescue**

by Catherine Treadgold

HCDE has a new a mascot: Bucky the PeopleBot robot. PeopleBot is a trade name of Mobile Robots, Inc., which builds robots for research and industry.

Assistant Professor Sarah Kriz oversees the Human-Robot Interaction (HRI) study, assisted by PhD candidate Jonathan Morgan, freshmen programmers Ian Finder and Eli White, and Master’s student Priya Guruprakash Rao.

Bucky’s keepers affectionately refer to “it” as “him.” The robot and his human crew were the first to settle into their new HCDE quarters on the largely vacant fourth floor of Sieg Hall. Bucky’s namesake and screen avatar is twentieth-century inventor Buckminster Fuller, one of the most prominent leaders of human centered design. Kriz’s earlier HRI experiments were with Sony’s robot dog, Aibo. “This robot has a lot more power,” she says, “and a lot more you can do with programming.”

Kriz studies how test subjects’ preconceptions and attitudes color their interactions with robots and what it is about a robot’s voice or manner that attracts or repels. Her educational background—a PhD in Cognitive Psychology and a Bachelor’s and Master’s in linguistics—makes her well qualified to pick up nuances in human expression and behavior. The goal is to improve human/robot relations: “You can make robots do amazing things, but what behavior will make them acceptable to humans?”

In the not-too-distant future, service ‘bots will become commonplace. Kriz has applied for funding that would allow her to analyze how Americans 60 and older respond to robots. If frightened or annoyed by a robot’s manner, people are less likely to welcome its help. “I don’t think there’s enough research in human factors to really know what a good robot is for that population,” Kriz says.

Bucky’s mellow, baritone voice inspires trust. In a recent workshop, a group of high school students helped enact a rescue scenario, with Bucky as hero. The result was immortalized on DVD, complete with music and an interview with the student actors. They liked Bucky’s voice and friendly screen image, which morphed from Buckminster Fuller’s to a smiley face after the rescue. Bucky even earned a hug for his troubles.

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**From GUI to NUI**

On the Frontier of Human-Robot Interaction

by Jacob Warren

MSTC graduate Douglas Pyle, a robot enthusiast and User Experience Program Manager at Microsoft Robotics, believes HCDE graduates are well equipped to contribute to robotics, a fast-growing industry.

The robots of tomorrow will be dynamic, unlike modern computers’ GUI (graphical user interface), where users interact with machines using physical devices and on-screen elements. Armed with knowledge of users’ context and environment, robots will be able to engage them directly and intuitively—with a gesture, a spoken command, or an indication of need. This human-machine relationship is described as NUI, or natural user interface.

HCDE students can influence the design of NUIs. “HCDE students build systems that play nice with humans,” says Pyle. At Microsoft he focuses on human-robot interaction, a field that is based on communication theory and rhetoric. He credits his UW courses in information design and human-computer interaction with preparing him to think broadly about designing interactive systems.
Charlotte Lee Gets Her Ducks in a Row
by Devor Barton

The Computer Supported Collaboration (CSC) Laboratory was launched this year to research the design of information systems shared by multiple groups of users. Charlotte Lee established the lab as a way to investigate the development and use of information infrastructures in science and engineering, computer supported cooperative work, and computer supported cooperative leisure. Recent projects explore these themes with regard to environmental microbiology, functional brain imaging research, museum exhibition design, and even hobbyist rubber duck collectors.

The CSC Lab’s research will help computer scientists, engineers, domain scientists, and social scientists aid collaboration using cyberinfrastructures. Cyberinfrastructures are large-scale, data-heavy, geographically diverse scientific enterprises supported by advanced technological infrastructures such as supercomputers and high-speed networks. The Lab is currently performing cutting-edge research on two projects for the National Science Foundation, studying cyberinfrastructure development. One project compares two supercomputing centers, the National Center for Supercomputing Applications and the San Diego Supercomputer Center, while the other project involves the metagenomics of Marine Microbiology. The time environment is very different for these types of projects, as it can take 15 years to develop a system designed to last 100 years. Says Lee, “The technology is changing fast enough that it enables different scientific questions to be asked. The challenge is to design for innovation and design systems that are modular or flexible or somehow malleable enough to keep up with the rapid pace of science.”

Lee, who holds the Guinness World Record for largest collection of rubber ducks, learned qualitative research methods while studying Sociology. She prefers qualitative research to quantitative because it allows her to ask the questions that interest her most, such as the social implications of various technologies and how social norms get encoded. “Qualitative research is so powerful for uncovering how things get done, how processes change, and for uncovering tacit knowledge,” Lee says.

It takes a lot of time and coordination to equip and configure a lab. Now that the space is set up on the third floor of Sieg Hall, Lee is eager to get started and involve more students. Opportunities include taking part in research groups, conducting independent study, or becoming a research assistant.

For more information on the CSC Lab, visit https://depts.washington.edu/csclab. 

CHiLLin’ with Julie Kientz
by Devor Barton

A background in computer science and an interest in the broader societal impact of Health and Education led Professor Julie Kientz to create the Computing for Healthy Living and Learning (CHiLL) Laboratory. The CHiLL Lab is a collaboration between HCDE, the Information School, Computer Science & Engineering, and the Design, Build, and Use Group. Researchers from all perspectives, abilities, and disciplines work together using User-Centered Design processes like data gathering, focus groups, iterative design, prototyping, and evaluation to determine if technology performs as expected in a real-world environment.

Kientz draws research topics, identifying problems to be addressed, from personal experience and consultations with experts in Health and Education. Laboratory findings benefit not only the patients and students involved, but also their doctors and teachers. Current CHiLL projects include working with pre-school children with special needs through the Experimental Education Unit at UW and coordinating with the Seattle Children’s Hospital to bring developmental record-keeping technology to lower-income families.

One of the goals of the CHiLL lab is to motivate record keepers by improving efficiency, accuracy, and ease-of-use...and also, if possible, to make record-keeping fun. Because records in the health field are predominantly stored on paper, Kientz feels technology can improve the process, giving doctors more time with their patients and parents more time with their children. One project involves researching the effects of automated record-keeping to find out if it makes people less conscious of the actual process, and to identify the optimum balance between efficiency and data awareness. Kientz hopes this study will make health-based technology more empathic toward patients by conveying accurate health information with an appropriate “bedside” manner.

Although most studies take place in the field, there is also a physical lab on the third floor of Sieg Hall. This lab consists of two offices: a student workspace and a general research space. Kientz points out that two things help when starting a lab: a sense of humor and enthusiastic students. Students can assist the CHiLL Lab as part of a directed research group or through independent study. These could lead to a research assistantship and more in-depth research on projects that can make a difference to society. 

Charlotte Lee

For more information on the CSC Lab, visit https://depts.washington.edu/csclab.
Department Updates

Celebrating Change

Change Hosts Poster Session Event

by Kyle Hurt

Change is a group of UW faculty, students, and staff who are exploring the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in improving the lives of underserved populations. This past February, members of Change hosted a poster session event, bringing together individuals from the UW iSchool Center for Information and Society (CIS), HCDE, and the Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE). The following is an abstract for a poster by the UW HCDE group Modifying Methods for Persona Creation: Bringing User-Centered Approaches to ICTD Research, with members Cynthia Putman, Beth Kolko, Emma Rose, and Erica Johnson.

As part of the research involved in the Central Asia and ICT project, we have had many potential product ideas emerge from our findings, one of these products being a mobile social software (MoSoSo) directory. While the application of common user research communication tools, such as personas, typically requires researchers to interact with potential users in the context of a potential product, it was not financially feasible to conduct these kinds of studies for the MoSoSo directory. Consequently, we used the data we had—data collected for other purposes. We argue our method is applicable to other geographically distant audiences where user research in the context of a particular product is not always possible.

A complete list of abstracts are available at change.washington.edu.

E-Health in a Global Context: Designing Solutions that Span Geographies
Rebecca Walton, Beth Kolko, UW HCDE

E-Skills and Employability: Getting a Job in the 21st Century
Christopher Coward, Jay Freistadt, Michele Frix, Maria Garrido, Andrew Gordon, Phil Neff, Joyojeet Pal, Joe Sullivan, UW iSchool CIS

Building a Better Clinician Experience in OpenMRS
Yaw Anokwa, UW CSE; Christian Allen, Chase Yarborough, Partners in Health; Hamish Fraser, Brigham and Women’s Hospital

A New Generation of Open Source Data Collection Tools
Yaw Anokwa, Brian DeRenzi, UW CSE; Carl Hartung, Gaetano Borriello, UW CSE, Google; Adam Lerer, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Google

Does Public Access to ICT Have a Development Impact?
Chris Coward, Chris Rothschild, Rebecca Sears, Araba Sey, UW iSchool CIS

Internet Growth in Central Asia: Why So Flat?
Chad Driesbach, Rebecca Walton, UW HCDE

Integrating Projects with Tribal College Curricula
David Broderick, UW CSE

The Global Library: Responding to Information Needs in a Globalized World
Rucha Ambikar, Ricardo Gomez, Elizabeth Gould, UW iSchool CIS

Building a Universal Translation Service
Susan Colowick, Utilika Foundation; Jonathan Pool, TURING Center, Utilika Foundation

Building a Transportation Information System Using Only GPS and Basic SMS Infrastructure
Ruth E. Anderson, Anthony Poon, Caitlin Lustig, Waylon Brunette, Gaetano Borriello, UW CSE; Emma Rose, Cynthia Putnam, Erica Johnson, Beth E. Kolko, UW HCDE

RuralScope: An Information System for Tracking Rural Disbursements
Sai Gopal Thota, Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar, India; Rabin Patra, TIER Research Group, University of California, Berkeley; Joyojeet Pal, UW iSchool CIS

Promoting Interaction in Video-Based Agricultural Extension
Natalie Linnell, Richard Anderson, UW CSE; Kentaro Toyama, Rikin Gandhi, Microsoft Research India

Computer Games in the Developing World: The Value of Non-Instrumental Engagement With ICT, or Taking Play Seriously
Sunil Garg, Charlotte Robinson, Clint Tseng, Heather Underwood, Richard Anderson, UW CSE; Joyojeet Pal, UW iSchool CIS

Digital StudyHall Chinhat Evaluation Study
Richard Anderson, UW CSE; Urvashi Sahni, StudyHall Educational Foundation, Lucknow, India

HCDE Diversity Board

by Theresa Marambo

The HCDE Diversity Board comprises alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the department in the industry. This year, the chair is Carolyn Wei, the first PhD student to graduate from the department. The other two executive members are PhD student Sajaneet Halko and evening MS Student Ona Anicello. The board meets quarterly to improve the diversity of the department. In the past, its focus was on the Sakson Diversity Scholarship. This year’s recipients are Phun Lang and Hannah Getachew.

“We have been working on creating a mentorship program,” said HCDE Adviser Gian Bruno, who moderates the Diversity Board email list. “We want to show that the board recognizes that not everyone comes with the same preparation; students don’t always have equal access to education or tools for success. The board wants to provide opportunities to students who didn’t have these tools.” The mentorship program would pair students with alumni or people in industry. “We’re going to be looking beyond professional goals and looking at what type of person students want to be paired with, whether it is a person of color or gay lesbian bisexual transgender.”

The board is also brainstorming projects for the upcoming academic year. It hopes to build a professional development program, hold social events, and focus on recruiting students. “Once a student is here,” said Bruno, “it’s about what we can do to support them.”

The Change poster session event

22 \ re:Design
Economy Got You Down?

by Jacob Warren

Many students are anxious about the current economy, wondering what the job prospects will be after graduation. They may ask, “How do I get an interview when job availability is low?” or “Once I have a job, how can I avoid getting laid off?” In these uncertain times, students are seeking practical advice about how to prepare, get noticed, and be competitive. Fortunately, three TC alumni—Eva Snee, Ariel van Spronsen, and Doris Minor—are pleased to offer their unique perspectives on how to thrive in the workforce.

Snee earned her MSTC by taking a highly interdisciplinary assortment of classes, sampling offerings from Psychology, Industrial Engineering, the College of Education, and the iSchool. She recommends the interdisciplinary approach, saying, “it gives you a more well-rounded perspective and looks good on a résumé.”

Snee applies her knowledge as a user-experience researcher at Tyler Technologies. Despite the economic downturn, she believes plenty of usability-related jobs are available, particularly in Seattle’s many software and web-development companies.

Even so, usability researchers must be prepared to sell skeptical employers and colleagues on the value of their work. Snee has a few tips. First, she shares collected data during meetings. Video footage always goes over well. Second, she strives to make coworkers by inviting them into the lab to oversee and help out with studies. After employing these strategies, Snee has noticed an increased appreciation for usability in her company, and she is invited into the design process earlier and more often. By actively promoting the value of her field, she has increased her value as an employee and her job security.

To HCDE students facing a tough job market, Snee suggests three strategies: “network, network, network.” Network by getting to know your fellow students, who may eventually be your colleagues. Network by getting to know faculty and staff both inside and outside of the HCDE department. And most especially, network by attending events such as the following:

- Puget Sound SIGCHI meetings (www.pssigchi.acm.org)
- Information Architecture Meetup (http://ia.meetup.com/57/)
- Girl Geek Dinner (http://www.seattlegirlgeekdinners.com/)
- STC Puget Sound Chapter meetings (http://www.stc-psc.org/)
- Interactive Design Association face-to-face meetings (www.ixda.org)

van Spronsen holds an MSTC and works as a User Experience Architect at ZAAZ. Like Snee, she emphasizes the marketability of interdisciplinary skills, particularly in today’s economy. She senses employers are looking for professionals who have a broad set of skills and can take on various roles.

What does this mean for HCDE students? Job availability for a given student will depend on his or her spectrum of skills. For instance, students might broaden their appeal by showing aptitude in project management, design, science, and research.

van Spronsen advises students to enter the workforce with realistic expectations. Students may not be able to land a job they are passionate about straight out of college—but they can close. In the early days of her career, van Spronsen knew she wanted to work in information design, so she began by taking a coordinator role in an information design department. There she was able to learn the work—the skills, language, and business factors—“by proxy,” absorbing information from her coworkers until, with a bit of gumption, she became one of them. If students can’t land that dream job off the bat, they can strive for something on the periphery and work their way in.

Minor, a nuclear engineer with an MS in Engineering with a nuclear emphasis, has been both a student and a teacher in HCDE. She has advice for engineers who want to augment their degrees but are not sure how: “If I am competing for a job with another engineer of equal technical skill but my technical communication skills distinguish me, I will get the job.”

Minor believes the most successful engineers back up technical skills with well-developed communication skills. She recalls a time when engineers rounded themselves out by taking business classes; however, she believes their time is better spent these days pursuing a minor or a certificate in HCDE.

Although Minor advises engineers to develop communication skills, she also advises HCDE students to develop technical skills. “Focus on the form,” Minor says, “but also on the content.” In other words, HCDE students should study rhetoric and design while also learning the subject matter they will communicate. Students who immerse themselves in technical topics that interest them will be more competitive for specialized entities, such as Boeing or Zymogenetics.

As these three alumni can attest, students can take heart, but they should also take initiative. The jobs they want are still out there, but getting and keeping them will require the courage to be known, to be noticed, and to be knowledgeable.
Looking for Work?

Make Your Portfolio Work for You

by Tiffany Rooney

If you're applying for a job, a professional portfolio is a must. Even if you already have one, the next guy in line does too. So how do you get noticed? Take the advice of three MSTC alumni who have successfully done just that.

In a recent presentation, Matt Carthum, Ariel van Spronsen, and Eva Snee divulged their secrets about creating effective portfolios. Because deliverables are the nature of the work, they said, you have to show employers your skills as well as telling them. A portfolio not only proves (or disproves!) everything in your resume, it gives employers evidence of your process and thinking—which is the real value. And while a portfolio typically defines you for others, it can also define you for you. Take to heart the advice of Carthum, van Spronsen, and Snee, and your portfolio will have employers fighting over you.

The biggest takeaway from the presentation is that your portfolio should showcase—well—you. Specifically, three aspects of you: your situation, skill set, and passion. These aspects embody who you are, which is what employers want to see in your portfolio. Your message must be apparent in your situation, skill set, and passion.

First, ask yourself what situation you want to be in. You can either be employed by the company that produces your projects, or you can be a consultant working on projects another company produces. In other words, are you an “innie” or an “outie”? Innies prefer the slower, more stable road, working with fewer clients and delving deeper into projects; the kind of life the computer, he says, “I spent evenings to one project writeup. Rather than 30 straight hours at the computer, he says, “I let it come organically over time. Snee’s first portfolio took her about a month. “The hardest thing was finding pieces and putting them into a format for employers, not professors,” she said. Or like van Spronsen, you can spend 15 minutes each morning writing out thoughts, or even five minutes whenever you think about it. How do you know when your portfolio rocks? Have others review it—in fact, have them tear it apart!

Spend a few hours each quarter updating your portfolio with recent projects. Rather than building up a store, replace pieces when you produce a similar one that’s better. Video highlights and links to LinkedIn or similar professional sites (not Facebook) are good to have in your portfolio. It shows employers that you know the field and are taking advantage of the tools. Writers, expose chunks of your documents on the website (maybe two pages of a 24-pager), then have a PDF of the full piece. And just because you’re a writer doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have graphics on your site.

Ready to get started? “Google ‘professional portfolio’ with a keyword from the field you want to work in, and see what comes up,” van Spronsen advises. Snee agrees: “That’s where I got a lot of my good ideas.”

As for skill sets, the alumni outlined three broad categories: research and analysis, synthesis and strategy, and design. Research and analysis covers surveys, usability studies, and heuristic evaluations. If you love creating personas and scenarios, analyzing site landscapes, or mapping out tasks, you should showcase synthesis and strategy projects. If you’d rather leave research to others so you can draw up storyboards, create prototypes, and design navigation, you should highlight your design work. Whether you choose from these categories or invent your own, make your portfolio shine in that area; don’t try to prove that you can ‘do it all.’ Snee shared her experience with this: “My first portfolio wasn’t very focused. It said, ‘Look at all the things I’ve done,’ but only three or four of my 12 pieces showed what I wanted to do instead of what I could do.”

Finally, what’s your passion? This is the thread that ties your portfolio together. As the alumni put it, “What do you geek out on?” Whatever it is, potential employers want to see it—even if it lies outside the field.

As you piece together your portfolio, there are some general guidelines to follow:

- Create a thesis. This is where you really define yourself. Your thesis should be apparent in your situation, skill set, and passion.
- Express your skill set. Show off what you’ve done (it’s okay if you only have samples from class!). Give employers details about how you did it. Post pictures, early concept sketches, anything that shows your process. Carthum’s advice is to carry a camera with you all the time; snap pictures of whiteboards as you work. Explain your role—how did you contribute to the overall project? What did you learn?
- Practice what you preach. All of the skills you’re selling must be evident in your portfolio. Your message must be communicated effectively. You cannot claim to be an expert in usability and design with a portfolio that is neither usable nor well-designed.
- Be ready to present. Don’t assume employers have seen your portfolio when you walk into an interview. Instead, bring a slideshow of your pieces on a thumb drive. It’s quicker than presenting from your website—no Internet-connection problems and less text. Present your strongest pieces first, memorizing your story for each and the order in which you will present them. Also, print pieces for employers to flip through; they may be more impressive on paper.

- Be proud of it! Show your personality and spend time on it—but not all at once. Carthum dedicated entire evenings to one project writeup. Rather than 30 straight hours at the computer, he says, “I let it come organically over time. Snee’s first portfolio took her about a month. “The hardest thing was finding pieces and putting them into a format for employers, not professors,” she said. Or like van Spronsen, you can spend 15 minutes each morning writing out thoughts, or even five minutes whenever you think about it. How do you know when your portfolio rocks? Have others review it—in fact, have them tear it apart!

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Ready to get started? “Google ‘professional portfolio’ with a keyword from the field you want to work in, and see what comes up,” van Spronsen advises. Snee agrees: “That’s where I got a lot of my good ideas.”
In the past few years, I’ve finally had time to spend on creative pursuits. I do a lot of textile art, dyeing and painting fabric, which I then use to make art quilts. I’ve also gotten back into photography, which I’d like to incorporate into textile and mixed media art. And thanks to my stepson, I’m now a grandmother of three!

Gary Faircloth, ’94
BSTC
gfaircl@us.ibm.com
Software Engineer
IBM
http://www.arkadianriver.com

I’ve been spending most my time lately hacking code and helping provide the infrastructure necessary for our writers and translators to make the most of all the authoring and publishing technologies that keep sprouting up. I love working on a multidisciplinary team with user experience professionals, writers, translators, software developers, support folks, and of course the customers themselves. Also, I really dig hacking away at the software applications that help all these people be more productive.

IBM is truly an international company. It has, thus, maintained the infrastructure needed to bring its global employees together. After much negotiation, I’ve recently been able to take full advantage of this infrastructure to work remotely from home. I enjoy quality health insurance and, of course, getting paid to do what I love rather than paying for it.

Every single TC class taught me something I use nearly every day. Seriously. From editing to project management to the multidisciplinary projects in Dr. Furness’ human factors class, it’s all there in the software industry.

Jason Black, ’95
BSTC
editor@PlotToPunctuation.com
Book Doctor [self-employed]
http://www.PlotToPunctuation.com

I’ve been establishing myself as a freelance “book doctor.” Novelist, especially first-time novelists, are still learning the ropes of what it takes to put together a winning, and publishable, story. They make a lot of mistakes. A good book doctor can help them find and fix those problems to elevate their story into a form that is engaging, fun, and lively. I still write novels, and enjoy that immensely, but as a book doctor I find it very rewarding to help other people realize their own goals in writing. While my specialty is in “book doctoring” for fiction, I have extensive background in technical writing and software documentation, so I am also happy to help with non-fiction book doctoring as well as Master’s and PhD thesis editing.

I’ve been contracting at Microsoft for the past two years. Like everyone, I’m doing my best to weather the recession.

Heather (Larson) Beebe, ’88
BSTC
heather.beebe@ge.com
Lead Technical Writer
GE Healthcare

The projects I’ve been working on include involvement in planning toward implementation of a content management system for our documentation, and work on various departmental subteams dedicated toward quality improvement of documentation set. Receiving an assignment for new software development is a lot of fun for me! I get job satisfaction out of learning how the pieces of the puzzle fit together, trying to break the software, planning what needs to be written, and (finally) the actual writing.

From my time in the TC program, I gained a thorough grounding in best writing practices, including usage, grammar, and basics. These laid the foundation for the success I’ve had in my career. Also, the introduction to project management from Mike White and the bits and pieces from that class have helped immensely throughout the years.

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Lorraine Edmond, ’89
MSTC
edmond.lorraine@epa.gov
Geologist/Environmental Scientist
United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)

I co-authored the Columbia Basin State of the River Report for Toxics and the USEPA Region 10 Mercury Reduction Strategy. Since then, I’ve been working on a monitoring strategy for toxics in the Columbia Basin, ways to reduce mercury, and mining projects in Idaho and Alaska. I have a great job that combines my Earth Science knowledge from my first two degrees and the communication skills from my TC degree. I apply these every day as I work with an extremely diverse group of people with a common goal. I appreciate that UWTC was so extremely interdisciplinary—little did I know how that would become an ongoing theme in my career.

And as much as I sometimes hated “group projects,” everything I do is a collaboration. My recent projects have been extremely interdisciplinary and collaborative. I’m happy to be applying my knowledge to the type of work I believe is important.
I had my first novel published, and am still working on getting the other three finished and published. It’s hard to beat deciding to make a career out of using the skill I best enjoy practicing; if you can’t find a boss to pay you to do what you love, you just have to be your own boss. Working on my own time, to my own schedule, and being the master of my own fate is challenging, but it feels great.

I have strong native writing skills, but without doubt I would not be nearly the writer or editor I am now without the skills I learned at UWTC. It is, in Isaac Newton’s immortal words, like standing on the shoulders of giants. I can scarcely begin to list all the crucial writing lessons I learned at UWTC that I did not, thus, have to discover for myself the hard way.

_Bread for the Pharaoh_ (Long Tale Press, 2008)

Norm Ely, ’95
MSTC
norm@normely.com
Website Maintenance (self-employed)
http://www.NormEly.com

I’ve been working on product naming: “Veganize It,” a feature in VegNews magazine—I came up with that name. It is a column about taking favorite food dishes and making them vegan. I hope to move into more copywriting and naming work in the future. I’m in training to hike the John Muir Trail this fall (around 200 miles), and I spent two days at Infineon Raceway last fall learning to ride motorcycles at high speeds. I’ve also been working on optimizing Pay-Per-Click ad campaigns and optimizing websites for search engine ranking, as well as website maintenance, copywriting, and product photography. Being self-employed, I enjoy working at home in warm fuzzy clothes! And there’s no driving. I have two amazing two-year old girls in my life that I’m really enjoying hanging out with. One is my granddaughter.

Thanks to my time at UWTC, I now know how much I don’t know. Seriously, that is important in this fast-paced field. Also, the idea “Who is the audience?” has been profoundly helpful in every facet of what I do. But now that I’m out in the “real world,” I enjoy that I no longer have homework!

**1996–1997**

Tamara Adlin, ’96
MSTC
tamara@fellswoop.com
Partner
Fell Swoop, LLC
http://www.fellswoop.com
http://www.corporateunderpants.com

I have been busy with lots of client work, giving talks and seminars on personas, founding Fell Swoop (my new partnership!), etc. I love the work. I especially enjoy user-centered strategy work, which involves wrangling stakeholders. It’s amazing how much great design depends on clarity from the top—and amazing how seldom there is clarity at the top!

Teaching was a big deal for me during my time at UWTC. It made me super-comfortable giving presentations and running workshops.

Gerald S. Ferry, ’96
BSTC
gsferry@hotmail.com
Content Publishing Manager
Microsoft

After some adventures in the upper ranks of the ISV community, I’ve moved on to my next challenge. I’m now at Microsoft leading content development and related usability initiatives on the Windows Mobile platform in commercialization. I’m having a blast! I especially like the challenge of working with highly motivated and focused people and projects. I also like the fact that my team has a direct impact on the quality of a product that goes out the door, and on the quality of service experienced by our customers. I’m looking forward to a fun time growing my career at Microsoft, helping shape the future of information flow and management.

My family is growing another node, with son 2.0 on the way, due around May 5, 2009. Current son 1.0, born on June 11, 2006, is pushing the three-year mark. For anyone that might be interested in talking about career moves or other “real world” events, just give me a shout.

Dan Jones, ’96
BSTC
dcj8@cornell.edu
 Programmer/Analyst
Cornell Law School
http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/

I’ve been working on a lot: online reunion registration, the new Avon Center for Women and Justice site, producing and consuming RSS feeds, online student course evaluations, online applicant status checker, integrated room reservation, event calendar, and Audio-Visual support request site—lots of fun projects! Planning and implementing complex interactive sites is oddly enjoyable. I really enjoy being part of a world-class school that produces world-class lawyers. Continued gainful employment is a plus, too. From my time in UWTC, I’m glad that I learned user analysis—it’s still paying dividends.

Recently, my father and I took a 3,000 mile road-trip in a 53-year-old Austin-Healey 100 (a classic British convertible sportscar). I had a great time but got very sunburned.

Ross Junkin, ’96
BSTC
dblply2@yahoo.com
Engineer Technician III
City of Covington

In early 2009 we completed a $4 million capital improvement project for the City of Covington. As the resident engineer for the project, I oversaw all aspects of the construction phase including inspections, negotiations, payments, material testing, payments, and design changes. I truly enjoy being outdoors, and being able to do that during work hours makes going to work even more enjoyable.

The “real world” presents its own set of challenges that most of us couldn’t anticipate as we left college. I remember my first few years upon graduating...
and being free from studying and homework. Wow, what freedom! So, what I enjoy most about being in the “real world” is the lack of homework. For me, the biggest thing has always been the long journey of finishing what I started. I have definitely applied the understanding of perseverance in my daily life after graduation.

After I graduated with my degree and finished playing baseball at UW, I signed a contract and played professionally. After a few seasons, I retired from baseball and came back to the Seattle area to begin my career. My wife and I have two wonderful children, one boy (age three) and one girl (age one), both of whom keep us on our toes and in shape.

I’ve been working at the Federal level recently and co-authored two white papers in 2008. Recently, I’ve applied my experience in human experience design to the public policy arena. Projects include a process for the sharing of maritime threat information with the private sector (which includes some studies at the Port of Seattle), communication audit for the Business Transformation Agency, stakeholder analysis and design of strategic communication surrounding the US Navy’s energy reforms, and facilitating strategic communication, risk management, and leadership workshops. As a consultant and researcher, I’m really grateful that I’m able to interact with such a wide variety of people and businesses. In 2008, I became a research associate for the Naval Postgraduate School and am now looking more broadly at change management and organizational behavior issues related to the design of new business policies and processes.

From UWTC, I gained a fundamental understanding of audience, context, and the rhetorical nature of design. Now that I’m in the “real world,” I enjoy simply being.


I’ve been out in the “real world” for eight years as a technical writer, information designer, product manager, and marketing manager. The real world is certainly exciting, but now I’m looking forward to getting back into academia and applying my experience from the “real world” to teaching and research. When I was a student at UW, I did not fully understand how universally useful the skills covered in technical communication would be in professional settings. The degree is something that all employers have been interested in learning more about and have asked me to describe in my interviews. I’ve found the education and degree from UW has been very lucrative. Applying these skills enabled me to quickly move into management in the biotechnology industry.

Online pharmaceutical marketing & health care consumer empowerment. Annual Conference of Association of Teachers of Technical Writing. (March 2009).


I’ve been working at Microsoft Robotics, where I envision how people will interact with a new product. What I like about being in the “real world” is that there’s even more diversity of people and ideas, which makes for a truly challenging and fun career. From UWTC, I appreciate gaining the ability to think across disciplines, and the ability to think of the larger context regarding how people interact with things made by others.

I recently took my daughter to the zoo. It was great!


1998–1999

Scott Mogull, ‘98
MSTC
mogull@alumni.washington.edu
Editorial Assistant, Technical Communication Quarterly
Adjunct Associate Professor
Texas Tech University/Austin Community College
http://www.mogullonline.com

I am finishing a doctoral degree in TC and Rhetoric at Texas Tech University. My research explores the effect of pharmaceutical marketing (“direct-to-consumer advertising”) on healthcare consumers from a technical communication perspective. I am specifically interested in the use of new media, such as Web 2.0, and the impact this has on traditional patient-physician relationships. I really like being in academia, which enables me to continue to read, learn, and teach. Also, I like the opportunity to work from Starbucks. ;-)

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Michael Stivers, ‘97
MSTC
mstivers@yahoo.com
Quality Analyst
QAD

After many years of technical writing, I decided to try something new: quality assurance. Testing software has a lot in common with writing about software, although as a technical writer you are really not supposed to break things (are you?). It’s fun to explore the outer limits of the code. I’m glad for the time I had at UWTC to study theoretical issues that widened my perspective.

Anita Salem, ‘97
MSTC
asalem@salemsystems.com
Researcher
SalemSystems
http://www.salemsystems.com

I’ve been working at the Federal level recently and co-authored two white papers in 2008. Recently, I’ve applied my experience in human experience design to the public policy arena. Projects include a process for the sharing of maritime threat information with the private sector (which includes some studies at the Port of Seattle), communication audit for the Business Transformation Agency, stakeholder analysis and design of strategic communication surrounding the US Navy’s energy reforms, and facilitating strategic communication, risk management, and leadership workshops. As a consultant and researcher, I’m really grateful that I’m able to interact with such a wide variety of people and businesses. In 2008, I became a research associate for the Naval Postgraduate School and am now looking more broadly at change management and organizational behavior issues related to the design of new business policies and processes.

From UWTC, I gained a fundamental understanding of audience, context, and the rhetorical nature of design. Now that I’m in the “real world,” I enjoy simply being.


In the Real World

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

I am designing mapping applications to help members, Church leaders, and friends of other faiths locate meeting houses and other Church resources. Additional scenarios we are trying to support are boundary decision-making and emergency response planning. I love digging into the requirements, conducting field observations, and designing solutions to match.

I appreciate the variety of skills taught at UWTC. I got to improve my communication skills, learn to be a responsible consumer of formal research, dabble in interface design, work in teams, and really focus on performing my own user research. This prepared me in many ways for the cross-disciplinary world I live in now. I can wear many hats, in part because UWTC prepared me for that.

I turned 40 and now have a teenager almost old enough to drive! I, my wife Kelli, and our seven kids are mostly healthy and happy, with the usual sprinkling of sick and ornery. We are active in our local Mormon congregation, with Kelli leading the children’s music each Sunday and me serving as an executive secretary to local Church leaders. I love working on projects that help people with things I really care about. Most recently that means using maps that help them get to Church, making good decisions, and planning for emergencies. Last year, it meant designing a system for about 40 people to use in planning missionary assignments for senior couples. As it turned out, my own parents were called this year to serve a missions. So your Mom can use it “now strikes very close to home!

Working in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries, I write regulatory documents for submission to the FDA and assist authors in developing clinical publications. Because the format and general content of clinical documents are predefined, much of the challenge comes from synthesizing massive amounts of data into concise reports. My work is a great fit for me. I enjoy a steep learning curve, which is easy to attain when writing a variety of documents in multiple therapeutic areas.

I entered the certificate program with a strong scientific background but without formal training in writing and editing. The UWTC training enabled me to develop the first user guide for a fledgling biotechnology software company. Although I’ve since focused on clinical communications, I’m still grateful for the skills and confidence I gained from my UWTC studies.

The past year has been exciting! My husband and I became grandparents, traveled to Peru, and formed a joint limited liability corporation (he writes and consults for the medical device industry). This year I’m giving back to the community by leading discussions on project management and productivity strategies at American Medical Writers Association conferences. My “real world” involves working independently in my office in rural Kitsap County, WA, as well as collaborating with a diverse spectrum of amazing people. I think this situation provides a wonderful balance. In my spare time I enjoy reading, hiking, creating handmade glass beads, and pampering my two cats.

Denise D. Pieratti, ’99
MSTC
pieratti@rochester.rr.com
Engagement Manager
Element K

I manage quality, cost, and delivery of custom e-learning development for many different clients. I enjoy all three aspects of my job: client contact, creative, and project management.

The greatest gift from UWTC was an understanding of, and appreciation for, rhetoric. It has helped me immensely in every job since I left UW.

Karen Sharkey, ’99
MSTC
karen.sharkey@microfocus.com
Senior Technical Author
Micro Focus, Ltd.

I’ve been working on the conversion of legacy documentation to XML, then to our Content Management System. I enjoy working with a world-class (not to mention world-distributed) group of technical writers. We have stimulating discussions about style, grammar, and who won the World Cup. Also, I enjoy the challenges and excitement of applying what I learned at UW to real projects for real customers. UWTC helped me develop the expertise to work at what I most enjoy doing.

I became a grandmother to a delightful little boy, Quinlan. This is truly the most significant event of my life! He’s almost four now and already showing signs of a potential engineer.

Roberta Connelly, ’99
Certificate of Technical Writing and Editing, BS, MS
roberta@ridgerim.com
Medical Writer
Ridge Rim Associates, LLC (self-employed)
http://www.ridgerim.com

I am designing mapping applications to help members, Church leaders, and friends of other faiths locate meeting houses and other Church resources. Additional scenarios we are trying to support are boundary decision-making and emergency response planning. I love digging into the requirements, conducting field observations, and designing solutions to match.

I appreciate the variety of skills taught at UWTC. I got to improve my communication skills, learn to be a responsible consumer of formal research, dabble in interface design, work in teams, and really focus on performing my own user research. This prepared me in many ways for the cross-disciplinary world I live in now. I can wear many hats, in part because UWTC prepared me for that.

I turned 40 and now have a teenager almost old enough to drive! I, my wife Kelli, and our seven kids are mostly healthy and happy, with the usual sprinkling of sick and ornery. We are active in our local Mormon congregation, with Kelli leading the children’s music each Sunday and me serving as an executive secretary to local Church leaders. I love working on projects that help people with things I really care about. Most recently that means using maps that help them get to Church, making good decisions, and planning for emergencies. Last year, it meant designing a system for about 40 people to use in planning missionary assignments for senior couples. As it turned out, my own parents were called this year to serve a mission where they will be using that very system. The old adage “design it so your Mom can use it” now strikes very close to home!

Working in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries, I write regulatory documents for submission to the FDA and assist authors in developing clinical publications. Because the format and general content of clinical documents are predefined, much of the challenge comes from synthesizing massive amounts of data into concise reports. My work is a great fit for me. I enjoy a steep learning curve, which is easy to attain when writing a variety of documents in multiple therapeutic areas.

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2000–2001

Julianne (Fondiller) Bryant, ’00
MSTC
julianne.bryant@gmail.com
Senior User Researcher
FTI Consulting

My work in Research & Advanced Development at FTI Consulting has been extremely interesting. Our software products, including Attenex Patterns, draw from the fields of information visualization, machine learning, and computer supported cooperative work with application to the legal domain of e-discovery.

I now have two amazing, energetic boys, ages three and five. While it’s challenging to balance motherhood and a career, my boys remind me to slow down and make time to laugh and play.
Amii LaPointe, ’00
BSTC
amiilapointe@hotmail.com
Intranet Manager
Northwestern Mutual

I am in the process of managing and leading a redesign of Northwestern Mutual’s sales force corporate intranet. The goal of this project is to redesign the field-facing intranet to be field-centric by using and applying usability best practices, standards, and guidelines. The redesign was driven by an extensive nationwide user research study. I enjoy educating coworkers about usability and applying my usability knowledge/education to all aspects of my work. I also really enjoy working on Search Engine Optimization and other opportunities which my degrees have afforded me both professionally and personally.

At UWTC I was given a solid foundation in a field that is narrow, but broad enough to apply to pretty much any industry. I really appreciate that I was able to receive a formal education in human centered design in the College of Engineering. The human centered design certifications and degrees available outside of UW are not as rigorous as one needs to be a usability expert. Additionally, the UWTC faculty is top-notch and well respected in our industry.

I received my Master’s in Technical Communication Management from Mercer University in Macon, GA in 2006, and will be celebrating my 12-year wedding anniversary in May.

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

I help groups improve their communication by watching leaders and groups change while trying different behavior. Teaching ranks as my most significant and useful experience at UWTC, particularly experiential learning models and application.

My first girlfriend in high school married me in December 2007, a full 20 years after we dated. We hadn’t spoken in 15 years until she sent an email in years after we dated. We hadn’t spoken in 15 years until she sent an email in

David Wu, ’00
BSTC
davidwu@davidwumusic.com
Product Data Management Specialist
The Boeing Company
http://DavidWuMusic.com

Here in the “real world,” I enjoy every opportunity for victory and self-improvement, whether that be in career, hobbies, or just in the process of keeping life balanced. At Boeing, I appreciate how integrity and quality are encouraged and expected in every aspect of what we do. Looking back at my time in UWTC, I appreciate the interaction among students, and the care exhibited by the superb faculty. I also learned to keep things clear, concise and lean—a great exercise not just in human centered design, but in life as a whole.

As a side music project, I produce The Fringemunks, who recap each episode of the FOX TV series Fringe with a song parody. It is a good exercise in music production/marketing, and has helped give my website a worldwide fanbase. I am also involved with the communications ministry at my church.

Sally Abolrous, ’01, ’02
BSTC, MSTC
sallya@hotmail.com
User Experience Consultant (self-employed)
http://www.abolrous.com/sally

I was at T-Mobile for five years as a UX Manager, managing both interaction design and user research. I led the design efforts for myFaves, messaging, Wave Hello, and other T-Mobile applications. I enjoy every aspect of the field I chose, from coming up with new product ideas to sketching out designs and testing with end users. I like to be part of the entire user-centered design process and enjoy working with creative people with the goal of creating compelling and easy-to-use products for the end users. UX is a very rewarding career. Whenever I design a good solution or discover and solve a design issue, I feel like I did a great thing (and I really did!).

I love my TC education. I think that the TC courses really gave me a strong foundation that allowed me to pursue any area I wanted to in UX, whether it’s user research, interaction design, visual design, or technical writing/editing. I also believe that strong writing skills, presentation skills, and attention to detail are critical in any work environment.

I left T-Mobile in December 2008 to pursue some freelance opportunities and spend more time with my family. Craig and I had our second baby, Sofia, on April 30, 2008. Dylan, her older brother, is now 2.5 years old, so we’re staying quite busy.

Scott Bush, ’01
BSTC
scott.bush@gmail.com
Web Computing Specialist
Office of the Registrar, University of Washington
http://www.scottbush.net

I enjoy design in all its forms, and I often blog about that topic on my website. Before coming to UW, I managed Quadrant Homes’ corporate website. Here at the Registrar’s office, I’ll be helping implement student web services as well as maintaining the Registrar’s web presence. I enjoy identifying issues and finding innovative ways to resolve them, whether that innovation is through new technology, improved processes, or just a little cleverness. The new job has been a significant change. It’s a lucky one, too, given the current economic conditions.

From my time at UWTC, I remember an adage from Professor David Farkas: “Leave your ego at the door.” I take that to mean what you do at work is for your employer, and any changes, criticism, or even praise should
be seen through that lens. Be passionate, but don’t let that get in the way of professionalism.

**Marita Stevens Graube, ’01, ’08**  
BSTC, MSTC  
marita@pixeltheoryinc.com  
Principal  
Pixel Theory Inc.  
http://www.pixeltheoryinc.com

I’ve been working full time under my own company, mainly with biotech clients in the Seattle area. My projects include scientific and technical content development and design for brochures, posters, and websites. Lately, I’ve applied my usability skills to work as the lead UX designer for a new web application at Merck. I really enjoyed the Master’s program at UWTC, and I use those skills in the real world every day. In my personal life, Dean and I married last September after ten years of dating.

**Paula Roberts, ’01**  
BSTC  
paularob@verizon.net  
High School English Teacher  
Riverview School District  
http://www.cls.riverview.wednet.edu/LanguageArts/Roberts/index.htm

As a teacher, I am continually creating and modifying curricula. Unlike other subjects, there is no “canned” curriculum. Students read novels, and I create the materials and learning experiences that facilitate comprehension and meaning. I also teach writing—including grammar and sentence diagramming—which requires weaving together multiple curriculum sources. This was the first year of a new year-long class focusing on American Literature. I have been working closely with my colleagues to design a curriculum we’ll use in subsequent years. Unfortunately, all the books are new to me except one—Tennessee Williams’s play *A Streetcar Named Desire*—so I’ve had to do a lot of reading!

I love the students and interacting with them on a daily basis! High school students are extremely funny and sweet. It helps that my sense of humor is about as mature as theirs. I was hired the year I graduated by an engineering firm as a technical writer. While I loved the people I worked with, I didn’t find the work to be particularly rewarding. I went back to school and earned a MS in teaching; I’ve never looked back.

I realize the path I chose after the program was not traditional, but I couldn’t be happier! I use a great deal of what I learned in UWTC every day. From Mary Coney, I learned how to teach grammar and the “objective style.” From Judy Ramey, I learned how to analyze a student’s strengths and weaknesses, and provide the best possible learning experience. From Tom Williams, I learned how to design visuals that optimize mental processing.

**Tristan Robinson, ’01**  
MSTC  
tristan_robinson@yahoo.com  
Senior User Experience Engineer  
GE Healthcare

I’m running customer collaboration groups on a GE Healthcare project called “Physician Experience Initiative,” which aims to redesign our Electronic Medical Record to better accommodate physicians’ workflows. I love working on a high-profile project where the value of my work is really appreciated.

Last year, I finished an MLIS degree from UW’s Information School and I finished an MBA at Portland State. My boyfriend and I are working on refurbishing a run-down little house in a great neighborhood of Portland.

**2002–2003**

**Tanner Taylor, ’02**  
BSTC  
tannerjtaylor@hotmail.com  
Technical Communications Specialist  
Expeditors

In additional to traditional tech writing, I recently had the opportunity to work on a video for the IT department. The goal of the video was to give people in our company (over 11,000 employees) a humorous glimpse into how the IT department functions, what some of the major projects are that we are working on, and how the field will be impacted and benefit from these efforts. It was a challenging project because we incorporated high definition video footage with PowerPoint and Flash animations to communicate the message. I learned a lot and hope to work on similar projects in the future. I’m learning that I like video to communicate a message, even though it can be more difficult. I’m also working on collaborating with the Support department more so we can make sure they have the tools and information they need to efficiently answer questions from our customers.

I’ve continued to enjoy working at Expeditors because they’ve given me the opportunity to work on a variety of projects and initiatives, whereas at other companies I might just work on Help documentation. I enjoy working with other disciplines and using the skills I learned while at UWTC to come up with creative solutions for real problems that exist in the workplace. UWTC gave me the foundation needed to excel in the “real world.” After that, it was up to me to continue learning more about the TC discipline and improve my skills.

I got married in 2006, bought a townhome in 2007, and watched our home value decline in 2008. I’m taking a vacation to Cancun in 2009 to forget it all! :)

**Michael LeBoeuf, ’03**  
BSTC  
m.r.leboeuf@gmail.com  
Senior Systems Analyst  
Boston Scientific

Since arriving at Boston Scientific, I have been tasked with reconfiguring the DTD and FOSI files that drive our XML output to support additional languages, and redesign one of our product containers. My long term goal is to move our XML authoring environment from FOSI to XSL-FO. In my new role, I am directly responsible for designing and developing the systems
architecture that our team of 25 writers depend on each day to quickly create and generate their technical content.

One thing UWTC best prepared me for was working with diverse groups of people while delivering my writing projects. I work with software developers, business analysts, regulatory personnel, and engineers. Each group has its own culture and set of priorities. Trying to persuade each group on why our department provides value in the engineering process is sometimes difficult, but without the ability to work with them and provide support for our writers, our projects would certainly cause delays in the process. Now that I’m in the “real world,” I enjoy reading about former students and how the department has continued to evolve and provide students with the necessary tools for entering the post-college world.

I recently married my fiancee Jessica March 14, 2009, in Minneapolis, MN.

**Merlla McLaughlin, ’03**
MSTC  
merlla@hotmail.com  
Senior Business Process Analyst  
T-Mobile USA

In the past couple of months, I’ve been implementing MOSS 2007 SharePoint for our library users and converting their process document development into it. I’m the process librarian/change manager for Business Operations, and on an ongoing basis, I manage change to process documents. I really like mentoring peers and library users as writers. I also appreciate the value of supporting best practices through documentation. At UWTC, I gained many specific skills, but also the general skill to abstract information in order to analyze it. In the “real world,” I love being able to pay the bills. I’ve also been discovering the richness of coworkers’ experience and knowledge. As a result, I’ve enjoyed forming a wide variety of work relationships.

My stepdaughter moved out on her own recently, so my husband and I are “empty-nesters,” although we see more of her now than when she still lived with us! Black, fuzzy Riser dog (whose picture stayed up on the break room bulletin board for a few years) finally passed away, but our young hound mix Willow amazes us daily with her capacity to snuggle and willingness to please. In another lifetime, I would train her as a rescue dog.

**Connie Missimer, ’03**
MSTC  
comiss@microsoft.com  
User Researcher  
Microsoft

I’ve been working on multi-touch, pen, and other very cool features for Windows 7. I enjoy coming up with new insights from the data and sharing them with my teams. At UWTC, Erin Schultz’s class on research methods gave tremendous insight into the ways you can investigate a problem and the data required. Now that I’m in the “real world,” I enjoy the independence. On a side note, our daughter started her freshman year at UW!


**Rachelle Vela Rabago, ’03**
BSTC  
rrabago@attinteractive.com  
Product Manager  
ATT Interactive

I’ve been working on Sales-facing software development, Yellowpages.com Online Product Management, writing software specifications, User Interface, Project Planning, and Technical Writing. I enjoy actually using what I learned in school in my job! I didn’t understand before why the curriculum was so diverse; now I know that when managing projects you have to know everything from writing to research to designing to development! I appreciate the professors, the research and reading, and the projects at UWTC! I have used everything I have learned and expanded on it.

In my personal life, our second baby boy was born in August 2008.

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**2004–2005**

**Jay Barker, ’04**
BSTC  
jbarker@jbarker.com  
Consultant  
Slalom Consulting  
http://www.jbarker.com

I’ve been creating a software platform for a lead-generation company that helps prospective students find educational programs. I’m glad when I can build user experiences that delight customers. In the undergraduate TC program, we learned to focus our work for the audience, the customer. That perspective has been especially valuable in my pursuits at work and elsewhere.

**Mary Deaton, ’04**
MSTC, Certificate of Technical Writing and Editing, User-Centered Design Certificate  
mmddeaton@mmddeaton.com  
User Experience Specialist (self-employed)  
http://www.mmddeaton.com

In June 2008, I was elected as Manager of the Society for Technical Communications Usability and User Experience Community. The community has over 2,000 members. In this economy, having a network to learn from, get support from, and perhaps get job leads from, is worth the cost of membership. I launched a manager’s blog to fill the news void between quarterly newsletters and set up a Twitter that follows all of the UX Rock stars. It is tempting to spend more time blogging and tweeting than doing work for clients. Additionally, it was exciting to work with the International Institute for AIDS Vaccine this year; I designed and facilitated remote usability testing of their redesigned site. The biggest challenge was including participants in Africa and other countries where Internet access is limited and, as we found out, not very stable.

I enjoy working for myself, working part time, not working in the summer and moving to my house in the mountains to garden, and the checks from clients. As for being in the “real world,” the whole world is real, even grad school. But the part of the world that is not grad school pays much better.
In the Real World

Kathryn Grainger, ‘04
BSTC
kagrainger@gmail.com
IBM
http://www.ibm.com/software/data/infosphere/warehouse/

I’ve been leading the InfoSphere Warehouse information development team as we expand our product to support additional data servers and integrate with other IBM solutions. Our team is mainly based out of Silicon Valley, but we also have team members in Germany, India, and China. It’s been great working with information developers and product developers around the world. I love working with such a dynamic and diverse team. Telecommuting full-time has allowed me the flexibility to communicate with my global team and maintain work/life balance. Working on class projects in groups readied us to take on the leadership that’s required when you get out into the “real world.”

Cory R. King, ‘04
BSTC, User-Centered Design Certificate
coryking@mozimedia.com
Founder
Mozi Media Group, LLC.
http://www.coryking.com

I’ve been working on contract jobs for various websites and clients, as well as on Mozicode, a web publishing toolkit that makes community easy. I enjoy finishing a project then looking at what was there before and wondering how anybody managed to use the old design. After taking Tom Williams’s Visual Media class, I now critique pretty much every sign I see. For example, if I was taking that class now and we were going over icons, I’d bring in a snapshot of those “Traffic Light Photo Enforced” signs. Personally, I think the picture of the old-school camera is too detailed and cultural for most people. On the other hand the tiny new no-parking signs with no writing on them are pretty well designed—they are even, dare I say, cute.

Now that I’m in the “real world,” I appreciate the ability to work full-time, and that there are no tests to study for. Also, we recently re-graveled our fish tank—pretty exciting!

Raina Richart, ‘04
BSTC
raina_r_r@hotmail.com
Consultant
The Mosaic Company

I love client interaction. I work with about 60 different advertisers. Each of them has a different business model, different priorities, and different goals. That keeps things interesting and keeps me on my toes. Being in the “real world” means new, unexpected challenges all the time. As soon as you think things have calmed down, something new pops up—even in this economic environment. Honestly, having a BS really means a lot in the real world. Even if you are not in a technical role, having that background/experience creates instant credibility in my industry.

I got married in August of 2008 to Brian McConaghy. It was a spectacular day that I won’t forget.

Craig A. Allen, ‘05
MSTC
Craig-A.Allen@ubs.com
Desk Developer
UBS

I currently work as a desk developer for the Interest Rate Derivatives trading desk at UBS’ Investment Bank in Tokyo. In my job I work closely with Interest Rate Derivative traders to analyze their risk, profit and loss, pricing, etc., and build tools to help them trade more efficiently. I recently completed a three-year post-graduate program in Finance, earning a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation. I also studied a shorter program in Financial Risk Management and Mathematical Finance, all of which helped me obtain the job.

I’m very excited about the department name change as I believe it much better reflects what I actually studied while at UWTC. I would like to thank UW HCDE for the Master’s degree, the computer programming skills, and the introduction to IBM, all of which helped me get started. My advice to students: the two most important things for your career are finding something you are very interested in so that you can be fully devoted to it, and building a strong network in your area of interest.

Shirin (Tabrizi) McConaghy, ‘05
BSTC
shirin.tabrizi@hotmail.com
Media Specialist
Microsoft

I think all of the time I spent with the faculty and staff at UWTC was well worth it. I learned something new every day from each person I interacted with, and I missed that experience after graduating. So I’m starting in the HCDE PhD program, which is very exciting. I’ll be trying to balance work, school, and life outside of both. I expect to have plenty of free time. Otherwise, I enjoy the lack of homework and the fact that I no longer need to sell my possessions on eBay to survive in the Puget Sound area.

Alex Thayer, ‘04
BSTC, MSTC, User-Centered Design Certificate
huevas@alumni.washington.edu

At ZAAZ I work on multiple projects and enjoy getting to think in diverse ways. Most recently I completed the redesign for www.becu.org. I love problem solving with other creative passionate minds. A room, a whiteboard, and a few brainy folks is heaven for me. It always comes back to audience and purpose, and that is fundamental to any design endeavor. I always bring our work back to this and it really helps to focus.

I moved back to Capitol Hill, and the return to a walking neighborhood has been such a great quality of life improvement!
I appreciate the variety of ideas we were exposed to in UWTC. The program offered both breadth and depth. In several of my classes, we were assigned projects for which we chose the subject, so it could be very relevant to our real lives and something we were innately interested in.

The professors in the UW Master’s program were passionate about their field and our learning, and the students were incredibly intelligent and interesting.

I really enjoy the amount of control I have over all of the help documentation at Expeditors. The variety in what I do every week is what keeps it interesting. In May 2009 I married Zachary Cook. For our honeymoon we went to Jamaica.

In the Real World

2006–2008

Christal Jenkins, ’06
BSTC
christal_jenkins@hotmail.com
Product Manager
Nuance Communications, Inc

I currently own two other businesses. Soulful Designs, LLC is a design solutions firm that does consulting, design, and maintenance for businesses, community organizations, and academic institutions. The other business I am partnering in is a company called “My 3D Yearbook.” We design online interactive flash yearbooks with audio and video capabilities for schools. The company will be launching this year. I love traveling around the world to work with customers and end users to determine what aspects of our products best meet their needs. I also enjoy working with all facets of the organization to drive the product strategy and key marketing initiatives that help our product grow within the marketplace. I enjoy that there are no bounds to success. What I put into it is what I get out of it! There are so many opportunities for personal and professional growth.

At UWTC, I learned that it’s okay to think beyond what has been given to you or what is written. I learned that we are the bridge between technology and the world. We must think beyond the scope and be effective in our communication and design. This educational influence has supported me in my personal and professional endeavors. The world is yours for the taking.

Lori Salmonsen, ’06
MSTC
lori.salmonsen@verizon.net
Curriculum Developer
Vertafore
http://www.amsservices.com/readyspot

I’ve been working on the Ready SPOT, which is a web-based training course that introduces new users to our AMS 360 software application. It can be viewed on the Vertafore website. I’ve also been developing application training for Vertafore end users, including ILT curriculum and web-based training, evaluating LMS tools, and creating templates for our trainers and others to use. I enjoy designing information and graphics that are aesthetically pleasing and easy for the user to understand, seeing opportunities where I can make something better and taking the initiative to make it happen, and completing my work in visual formats such as workbooks and online training.

Feiya Wang, ’06
BSTC
feiya.wang@gmail.com
Technical Communications Specialist
Expeditors International of WA, Inc.
http://www.feiyawang.com

I have written my first inspirational book, Discovering the True Love Within—Uncovering a Secret Never Meant to be Kept Unknown, which will be released in bookstores this year. The second book is in the works.

Ario Jafarzadeh, ’07
BSTC
ario@rmail@gmail.com
Interaction Designer
Google Inc.

I’ve worked on Google Toolbar as the UX lead and Google Chrome as the designer on the New Tab Page feature. I love collaborating with engineers and brainstorming solutions to thorny UX challenges, and am hoping to ship a new and exciting project in the coming months! I enjoy applying knowledge I gained in the TC program to “real world” projects and passing it along to others.

Steve Lappenbusch, ’07
MSTC, HCDE PhD Candidate
stevelappenbusch@gmail.com
Solutions Consultant
Lexis/Nexis Risk & Information Analytics Group
http://www.linkedin.com/in/stevelappenbusch

I just finished site visits to every field office for the Washington State Division of Child Support Enforcement. I collaborated with the senior support enforcement officers to generate a statewide workflow for DCS. We will use this to find points where we can improve their system’s performance in getting kids and parents the money they need. Every once in awhile I get to be at the desk of an investigator who learns something critical about their subject through Lexis services.

At UWTC, I’ve gained the ability to formally define and describe different ways people interact with technology. And I’m not actually in the “real world” yet. I’m still working on my PhD, so I’m half-in, half-out.

Steve Lappenbusch, ’07
MSTC, HCDE PhD Candidate
stevelappenbusch@gmail.com
Solutions Consultant
Lexis/Nexis Risk & Information Analytics Group
http://www.linkedin.com/in/stevelappenbusch
In the Real World

Sean Norsworthy, ’07
BSTC
sean.norsworthy@gmail.com
IT Specialist
Weyerhaeuser

I’ve had three different positions in my professional career. First I was a tech writer, then I was an e-business analyst, and now I’m a system engineer specializing in platform support for Business Intelligence and other IT applications, where I provide ongoing support of existing applications and implementation of new ones.

We’re currently busy getting a new release of Business Objects ready for production use. I enjoy the opportunities and continual learning. You can spend a lifetime learning and not even scratch the surface of all there is to know. It’s exciting being new to your career and not knowing what you’ll be doing in 10, 20, or 30 years. I recently got back from a trip to China. I wish I could travel more!

Charles Claxton, ’08
MSTC
charlie@produx.com
Principal/Director of Information Architecture
Produx
http://www.produx.com

I specialize in information architecture and user experience design for web-based applications, and have more than 11 years of defining, designing, and delivering interactive experiences for end-user consumer products and corporate audiences. Throughout my career, and further enhanced by my studies, I have built a deep understanding of user-centered design methodologies and cultivated an ability to facilitate seamless product introduction and integration. I enjoy taking projects from ideas through fruition and have had the good fortune to play leading roles in several successful product development initiatives with industry-leading organizations.

I am currently a partner at Produx, where we provide strategy, design, and marketing for interactive products, platforms, and applications. We offer UX design, Search Engine Optimization, Search Engine Marketing, eCommerce, Affiliate Marketing, Analytics, and Social Networking. We focus on measurable outcomes and offer specific expertise in transactional optimization.

Diana Widjaja, ’08
BSTC
dianawidjaja@gmail.com
Content Specialist
CBS Interactive
http://www.dianawidjaja.com

I work with the ZDNetasia.com production team where I manage the content development and localization of online campaigns for Asia Pacific. Topics revolve around server and storage systems, software, and IT management issues.

Lorie Whitaker, ’08
MSTC
loriewhitaker@gmail.com
Usability Analyst
Usability Sciences

I have conducted usability studies for a variety of clients including: American Heart Association, Sony, Dell, Grainger, Eli Lilly, NineWest, ScotTrade, Bayer, and Capital One. I still get a kick out of seeing participants using a site or product for the first time. I’m intrigued when users do something in a way different than I would, and I immediately start asking them questions about it! I feel fortunate that I can do this for a living. I enjoy talking with my colleagues about usability and some of the harder tests they have run and how they went about gathering the information they needed.

I really appreciated being around so many UX professionals during my time in class. They always added a “real world” feel to class discussions and now that I’m a UXer myself I really miss some of their insights! I graduated in Spring 2008 and took a usability analyst position with Usability Sciences in Dallas, Texas. I drove 2,300 miles to my new job and started the week after July 4th. I’m renting a house now and have planted my first vegetable garden!
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compiled by Kate Long

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