

WRTC Day

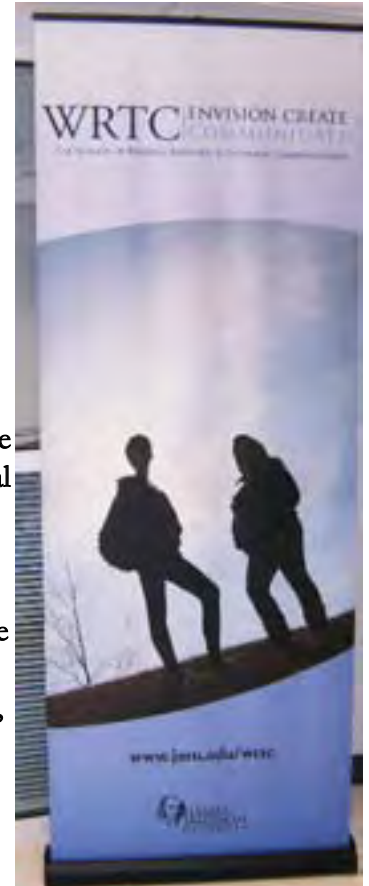
by Lauren Bennett

This was the first year that the WRTC Program hosted WRTC Day, an event where students, alumni, and professors gathered to converse about important topics related to furthering students' professional careers and skills as writers. Professor Michael Klein organized WRTC Day, which took place on September 22, 2011, in Harrison Hall and was composed of four informative panels: The Organizational Panel, The JMU Alumni Panel, The Society for Technical Communication (STC) Panel, and the WRTC Student Panel. WRTC Day was a great way for students to gain insightful advice and guidance on writing as a professional.

During the Organizational Panel, representatives from local businesses discussed the intern's role and the employer's expectations during the course of the internship. The representatives also provided information on different types of internships offered and described how the intern can benefit by participating in an internship. Students who are seeking an internship were encouraged to use JMU's Recruit-A-Duke program, a site that helps match students to potential employers.

The Alumni Panel consisted of recent WRTC graduates discussing how to use their acquired skills when transitioning into the workplace. The alumni who participated offered advice on the importance of networking and staying connected with employers from previous internships. Other advice that the alumni discussed pertained to marketing writing skills to employers. This, as the alumni stated, can be achieved by revising a resume to a particular job, providing writing samples to an employer, and composing a cover letter that highlights strengths acquired in the classroom setting or in an internship role.

The STC Panel hosted current members from the chapter who discussed their job positions and the benefits of being a part of STC. The members provided insightful information about STC and how certain skills acquired from the program can help when transitioning into the workplace. Participants from this panel stressed the importance of networking and keeping up-to-date with current technologies, as this will provide leverage when looking for potential job opportunities.



Graduate Students at the WRTC Meet and Greet

The Student Panel consisted of WRTC students who were associated with the professional programs offered in WRTC. Representatives from the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), The Harry Potter Symposium, The Graduate Symposium, and STC provided information about their program and what type of work they have achieved. Each representative highlighted skills they have acquired by participating in these programs and how they can apply those skills in a professional setting.

After the panels, participants were invited to the second annual Meet and Greet where students, alumni, and professors were able to get together and discuss the information presented during the panels. This was another opportunity for students to network with the alumni and establish themselves to professors.

While at JMU, you may have participated in or heard of the STC club that met throughout the year. At the time, you may have been too busy to attend the meetings or become a part of STC. Now that you are out in the professional world, I highly encourage you to reconsider.

The Society for Technical Communication is a professional organization that exists to help professional writers. With many member benefits, the organization is a great tool. When you join STC, you also join a chapter. STC chapters are located around the globe and across the United States. No matter where you live, there is sure to be a chapter close to you. This is a great tool to help you get started in the professional writing field and one that will assist you throughout the years.

A New TC Professional membership costs \$160 and is available for those who are new to the field. This is friendlier to recent graduates than a classic membership, which costs about \$250. In this membership you obtain access to online publications, archived seminars, a buyers' guide to products and services, a salary database, and one Special Interest Group (SIG).

Special Interest Groups are collections of professionals that have a common interest, who share their knowledge and experience with each other. Some examples of such groups are Emerging Technologies, The Illustrators and Visual Designers, and Technical Editing. By joining these groups, you open yourself to new knowledge and possible job advancement opportunities by your peers.

The online publications that a membership allows you to access are *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*. *Intercom* is a monthly magazine which publishes articles about current discussions in the world of technical communication. *Technical Communication* is a research-based publication that is put out on a quarterly basis.

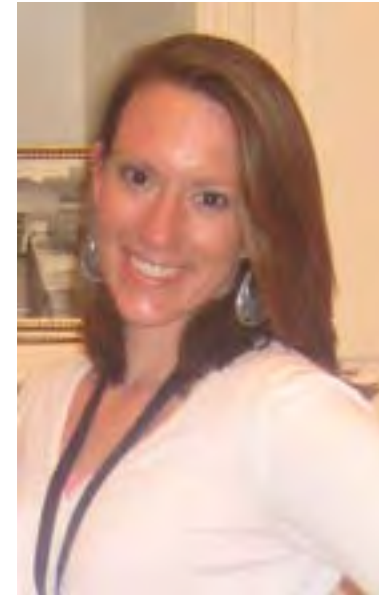
If interested in joining this wonderful organization, visit stc.org.



I graduated from the JMU TSC program in May 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. During my time in the program, I learned more than I could have ever imagined. The dynamic faculty and staff helped shape my skills, but more importantly they pushed to reach my full potential. The two computer labs in Harrison Hall became the places where I learned the fine details of genre writing, publication and project management, and instructional training. I also found what I wanted to do with my life after college.

Thanks to the program, I am currently employed by American Woodmark Corporation in Winchester, VA, as a Technical Writer. I obtained my position with American Woodmark exactly three months after my graduation from JMU and enjoy every minute of it. My diverse background in technical communication has provided me with the opportunity to develop

online help documentation in RoboHelp, create computer-based training modules with Captivate, write and update training materials for courses and projects, and deliver training in both classroom and video conference settings.



While at JMU, I was a student member of the Society for Technical Communication. I never realized the opportunities the organization presented until I was offered a full professional membership to the organization, courtesy of American Woodmark. I have met some of the most respected and notable individuals in the field of technical communication, networked with members of the Washington DC/Baltimore chapter, and attended the 2010 and 2011 STC Summits.

Whether you were enrolled in the program when it was the Institute of Technical and Scientific Communication or the School of Writing, Rhetoric & Technical Communication, you have had the opportunity to study in one of the best programs with some of the best professors at JMU. With that being said, I would like to thank Cindy Allen, Kristi Shackelford, and Dr. Elizabeth Pass for being the professors that made me want to come to class, encouraged me to step outside the box, push me to my educational

Harry Potter, a popular book series for over ten years, is now planting its roots within James Madison University's curriculum. Professor Elisabeth C. Gumnior is offering the course, Studies in Harry Potter, opening new doors of exploration, and creating a fresh look at academics.

During her interview on this magical topic, Gumnior stated the following when answering how alumni might be able to relate to the new program:

"[The class] reflects...JMU's ambitions to show the state, the country, and the world where the future of academia lies. For higher education to be relevant and stay relevant in the 21st century, it must not only engage with the world--that means with, among many other things, popular culture--but also show the world how to engage with it."

Because Harry Potter has become such a prominent phenomenon in the 21st century, many alumni along with current students can relate to this topic. In relating this course to the WRTC program, overall Gumnior said, "The class relates to WRTC in that it is a class in language and writing study that introduces students to important concepts in our field and illustrates these concepts with a content that is familiar and comfortable for most students." Within this comfortable setting, students are more likely to become engaged with the material and flourish as writers, ultimately learning an entirely new discourse in academia. Elaborating on her goal for the course, Gumnior is hopeful for, "...students [to] gain a greater sense of authority as writers by knowing more about the discursive practices and forms in (and outside of) academia."

With a book turned movie sensation, Harry Potter has continued to create a path for itself within the academic realm. Recently, JMU held the Harry Potter Symposium, Replacing Wands with Quills: A Harry Potter Symposium for Muggle Scholars. Gumnior led the Welcome and Conference Opening to kick-off the weekend-long seminar. The keynote speaker of the symposium was John Granger, [pictured at right] also known as the "Dean of Harry Potter Scholars" by *TIME* magazine. Gumnior goes on to explain the keynote speaker by stating the following:



"[Granger] does serious academic work on Harry Potter which he presents in a very accessible manner for both his academic and his non-academic (general) audiences. I think that the symposium will show that serious academic work doesn't have to be arcane and forbidding but can be fun and relatable to a broader topic and audience."

Presenters for the symposium covered an array of topics including fields of psychology, religious study, gender studies, education, literary studies, and linguistics—correlating each topic with the characters in Harry Potter.



Other types of Harry Potter-related programs have been offered at JMU. For example, *The Scholar's Wand*, an online journal dedicated to undergraduate research and writing on Harry Potter, is an ongoing project. Professor Gumnior comments on *The Scholar's Wand* by stating the following:

"We have tried several times to get the thing off the ground. So far, we have been stymied by the logistics of it, but we will continue to work on it. Thankfully, there are always students who want to contribute to this project, and I am confident that one of these days we will launch."

With such a fresh look at academic studies, JMU will be welcoming this approach to intriguing magical subject matter with open arms. Encouraging alumni to support this new field of study, Professor Gumnior states, "We must open our doors both literally and figuratively, both to the world and to each other. I hope that alumni would want to support that broader move and continue to show their pride in their alma mater as it progresses."

I graduated from the WRTC program with a BS in 2007. While completing my undergraduate degree in WRTC, I was encouraged by several professors to apply to the graduate program. I could not resist! I applied, was accepted, and received a graduate assistantship position within the department. As a graduate student and assistant, I improved my writing, editing, design, and critical thinking and collaboration skills. My hard work and determination paid off, and I was awarded a teaching assistant position the summer going into my second year. I am so thankful for my opportunity to teach an introductory technical communication course for two semesters. This experience taught me so much about myself and my interests within the field—instructional design and training.



As a result of my teaching assistant, I interviewed for an Instructional Systems Designer (ISD) position at Kadix Systems (now Dynamics Research Corporation), a government consulting firm in Arlington, Virginia. My experience in the classroom, knowledge of instructional design theory, and overall WRTC skill set prepared me for the interview process and ultimately landed me my first job. My new co-workers were (and still are) so impressed with my knowledge, skills, and abilities.

As an ISD, I work with other ISDs, graphic designers, and multimedia designers to design and develop instructor-led training (ILT), computer-based training (CBT), and Web-based training (WBT). Currently, I am working on a CBT called Money Smart for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. I love my job because I get to work with a variety of government agencies on topics that have included financial education, emergency management, and plant health issues.

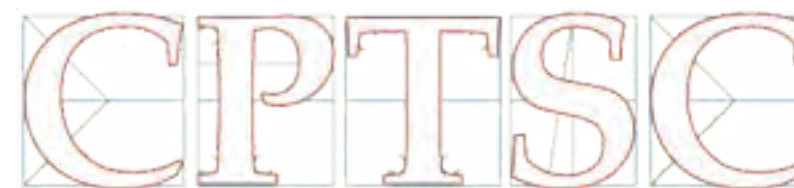
I am grateful for my BS and MS degrees from WRTC. Mostly, I look forward to giving back to the program and professors that gave me so much. Go Dukes!

Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication by Christine Wells

The Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) held its annual conference at JMU this year on October 6-8. Founded in 1974, the Council's purpose is to bring together writers and technical communicators in the academic world for a series of roundtable discussions. The organization's goals include promoting programs and research in technical and scientific communication and developing opportunities for the discussion of ideas.

The Council and JMU welcomed keynote speaker Dr. Hilary Hart from the Department of Civil, Architectural, and Environmental Engineering at the University of Texas. Dr. Hart presented on "Crossing the Not-So-Great Divide: Academic and Industry Technical-Communication Practitioners." Dr. Hart is also the president of the Society for Technical Communication and has been presented with the Distinguished SIG Service and the President's Award.

The Conference also welcomed plenary panel members Stephen A. Bernhardt, Carolyn Rude, and Dan Voss. Dr. Bernhardt is currently at the University of Delaware and was a past president of CPTSC. Dr. Rude has just finished a five-year term at Virginia Tech as a chair in their English Department and has previously been an officer of CPTSC. Mr. Voss is currently at Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control and offers his insight on ways to connect the industry and academics.



Helpful Programs for the Workplace

by Christine Wells

With the advent of technology, a writing professional can no longer only rely on pen and paper. Thanks to companies such as Adobe, Microsoft, and Madcap, programs have been created to help writers become organized, to help them create cohesive projects, and to help them become more interactive.

Adobe

The Technical Communication Suite 3.5, published by Adobe Publishing Product, includes some of the most popular programs of the day. Technical communicators will benefit from the use of these products:

- Adobe Captivate is an “elearning authoring software,” which allows you to import PowerPoint projects and make them interactive.
- Adobe RoboHelp is a program which allows several writing professionals to collaborate on a single project.
- Adobe Framemaker is a “template-based authoring and publishing solution,” which allows you to create and publish a document in several formats.



Microsoft

Microsoft Project 2010 is a program that stands alone. It assists in organizing and driving efficiency through your company. This program allows you to set deadlines, budgets, and has a collaborative platform so that multiple users have access.

Madcap

The Madcap collection of programs is a lesser known, but equally helpful group:

- Lingo is a translation tool.
- Mimic is an interactive software creator.
- Capture is a photo-catching program.
- Flare is an authoring and publishing program.

While being familiar with these programs will help you exponentially in the professional writing world, one must always be on the lookout for more up-to-date products. Adobe puts out new updates for these programs fairly frequently. Employers are continuously looking to adapt new programs that assist writers in authoring and publishing unique products. Making yourself adaptable in this fluctuating field will help draw these employers attention and help you secure a job.



Transition to the Workplace

by Michelle Cecchetti

On September 22, 2011, the WRTC program held WRTC Day. Guest speakers joined faculty and students in small round table panels. The panel about the transition into the workplace was particularly helpful because alumni presented their personal stories.

The Transition to the Workplace panel was presented by Liz Sonnenburg (Instructional Systems Designer, Dynamics Research Corporations), Tandylyn Terry (IBM) and Tiffany Painter Newland (Technical Writer, American Woodmark Corporation). The three alumni were informative when describing their transitional experience from college and graduate school to the workplace.

When asked if it was difficult to find a job after college, Liz Sonnenburg stated that she was interviewed two times for a job she acquired prior to the end of graduate school. “Writing and editing skills are very marketable in our economy,” Sonnenburg indicated. Through the WRTC program, students are required to take classes that accentuate writing and editing skills. It’s reassuring to hear directly from alumni who have graduated from the WRTC program that the skills they acquired while in school helped for a smooth transition into the workplace.

Tandylyn Terry had a similar story to tell when discussing her own transition. She explains to the audience that internships are essential, if not the key to success in preparing for the workplace. Terry was able to secure a job offer before starting her senior year due to her internship experience.

Tiffany Painter Newland shared her dilemma with the audience when choosing a job. She was offered a position on the outskirts of Harrisonburg, VA, that did not fulfill her expectations for a job. Her job offer through American Woodmark, her preferred position, was still up in the air, and she did not want to settle for anything else. She waited for a phone interview with American Woodmark (she explains this as a “Russian Roulette” chance) and gambled a job position with both companies. In her favor, she ended up getting the job with American Woodmark and declined the other.

The round table panel then proceeded to touch upon professional portfolios and resumes. Recent graduates benefitted by tailoring their resumes to specific job requirements, in order to catch a company’s attention. By putting forth your best writing pieces in a portfolio, you give a company the sense of your skill level and how you write.

“Don’t expect to be spoon fed,” Sonnenburg stated as the discussion came to a close. In order to be successful in the field you are pursuing, you need to be active within the company. As Sonnenburg, Terry, and Newland demonstrated, each transitional period from college to the workplace will be different. With effective writing and editing skills, graduates have been able to enter the work field with confidence.



Students at a WRTC Day Panel

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