Adding Value through Academic Research

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"A discipline is constituted not by each of us separately pursuing our own explorations but by a joint endeavor toward understanding."

Davida Charney

What is Academic Research in TC?

Broad Question: How do texts and related communication practices mediate knowledge, values, and action in a variety of social and professional contexts?

Research Directions in Response to Broad Question	
Practice	What are best practices of text development and design? How can content be managed for reuse?
Disciplinarity	How shall we know ourselves? What are our definitions, history, status, possible future, and research methods?
Pedagogy	What should be the content of our courses and curriculum? How shall we teach students best practices, history, and possibilities?
Social Change	How do texts function as agents of knowledge making, action, and change?

Where is Research Published?
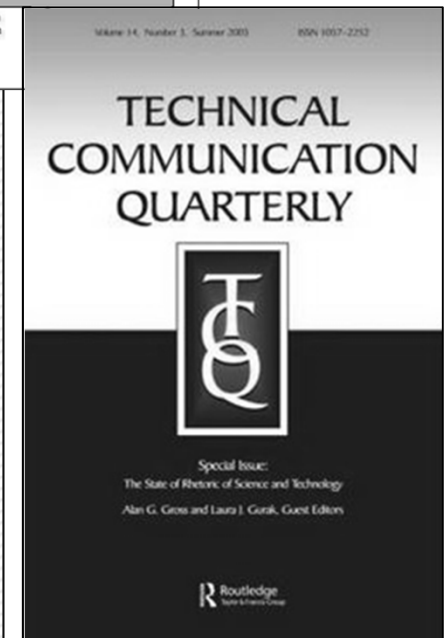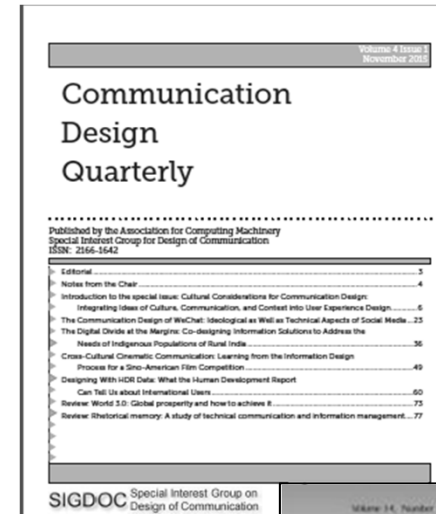
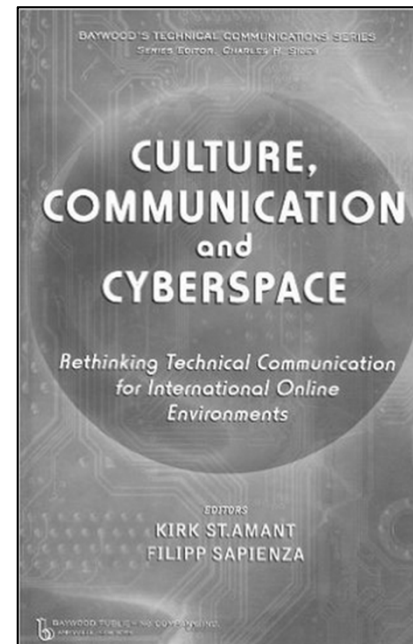Peer-reviewed Journals

Where is Research Published?
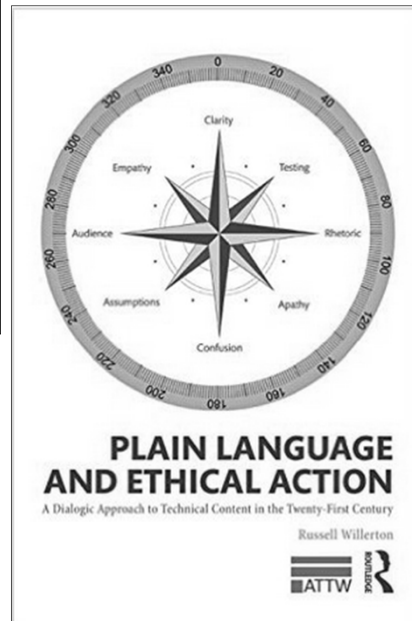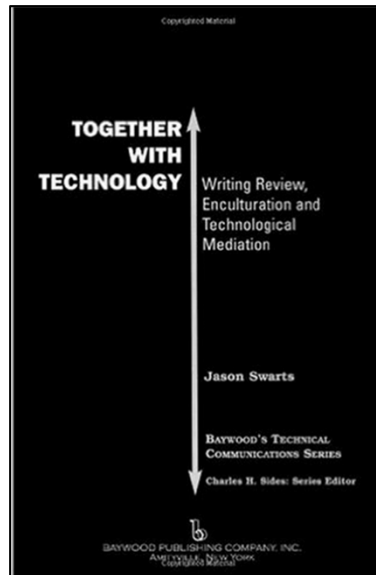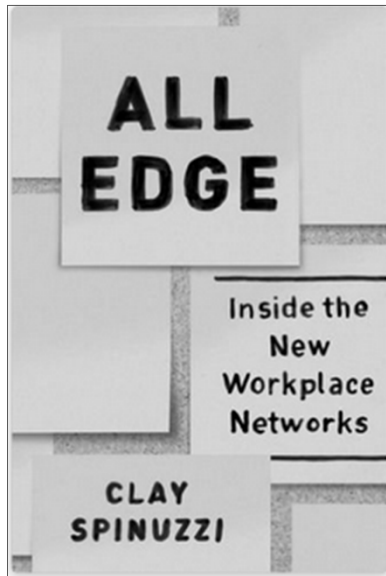
Scholarly Monographs

Edited Collections
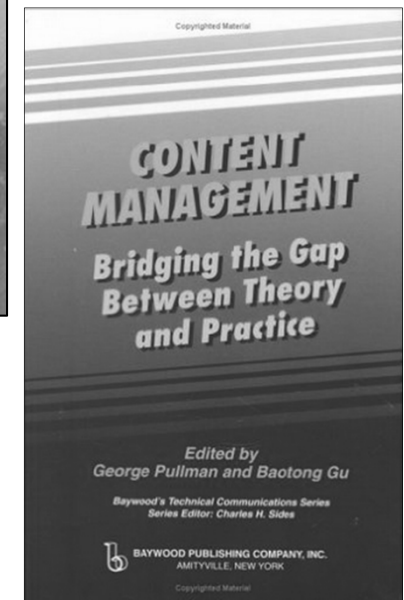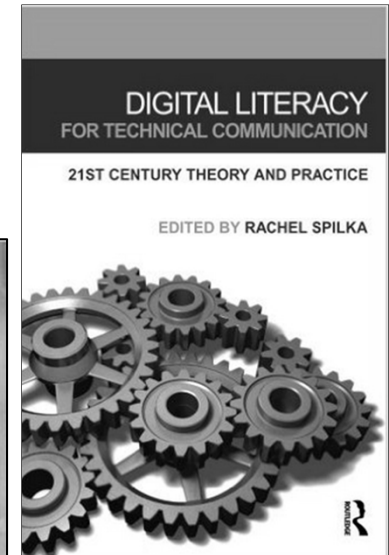
How Can Academic Research Add Value?

Example Studies Aimed at Improving Practice	
Instructional Videos (*TC*)	(1) Like It or Not: What Characterizes YouTube's More Popular Instructional Videos (2) New Modes of Help: Best Practices for Instructional Video
CMS Adoption (*IEEE TPC*)	(1) Planning for the Shaping Force of Cultural Dynamics in a CCMS Implementation (2) A Study of the Usefulness of Deploying a Questionnaire to Identify Cultural Dynamics Potentially Affecting a CM Project

Academic Research Trajectories – What Happened?

Trajectories

Improving Practice (1980s)

Exploratory (1990s and beyond)

Researchers interested in studying workplace practices and connecting research with practitioner needs

Researchers interested in establishing TC as a research field recognized for contributions to human knowledge. Research contributed to field's identity, establishing it as more than a field concerned with pedagogy and practice.

Survey Project

Survey of Technical Communicators' Experiences with and Perspectives on Academic Research

25 Questions, 181 respondents

How Many Years Have You Worked in the Field of Technical Communication?

[PERCENTAGE]
[PERCENTAGE]
[PERCENTAGE]
[PERCENTAGE]

- 0 to 5
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 20
- <25
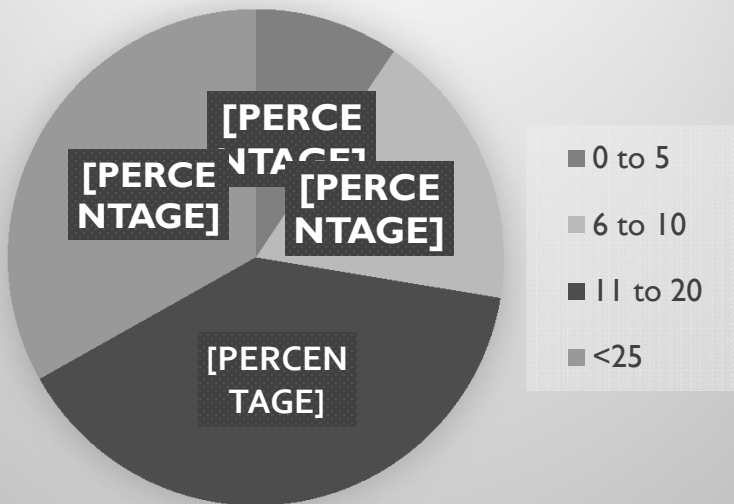
How Many Years Have You Worked in Management?

[PERCENTAGE]
[PERCENTAGE]
[PERCENTAGE]
[PERCENTAGE]
[PERCENTAGE]

- Not applicable
- <0 to 3
- 4 to 10
- 11 to 20
- <20

Survey Results

Q: What Degrees or Programs Have You Completed?

Bar chart of degrees/programs completed — categories (top to bottom): Associate's Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, PhD, MD, JD, Post-baccalaureate, Certificate, Professional Certification, Other (please specify). X-axis: 0% to 60%.

Bachelor's Degree Areas

Pie chart with segments: 38%, 7%, 29%, 26%.

Legend:
- Major, Minor, or Concentration in TC or PC
- Degree Possibly Includes TC Study (e.g., English, Communications)
- STEM Degree
- Other (e.g., Theology, Psychology)

Survey Results

Q: What Degrees or Programs Have You Completed?

Survey Results
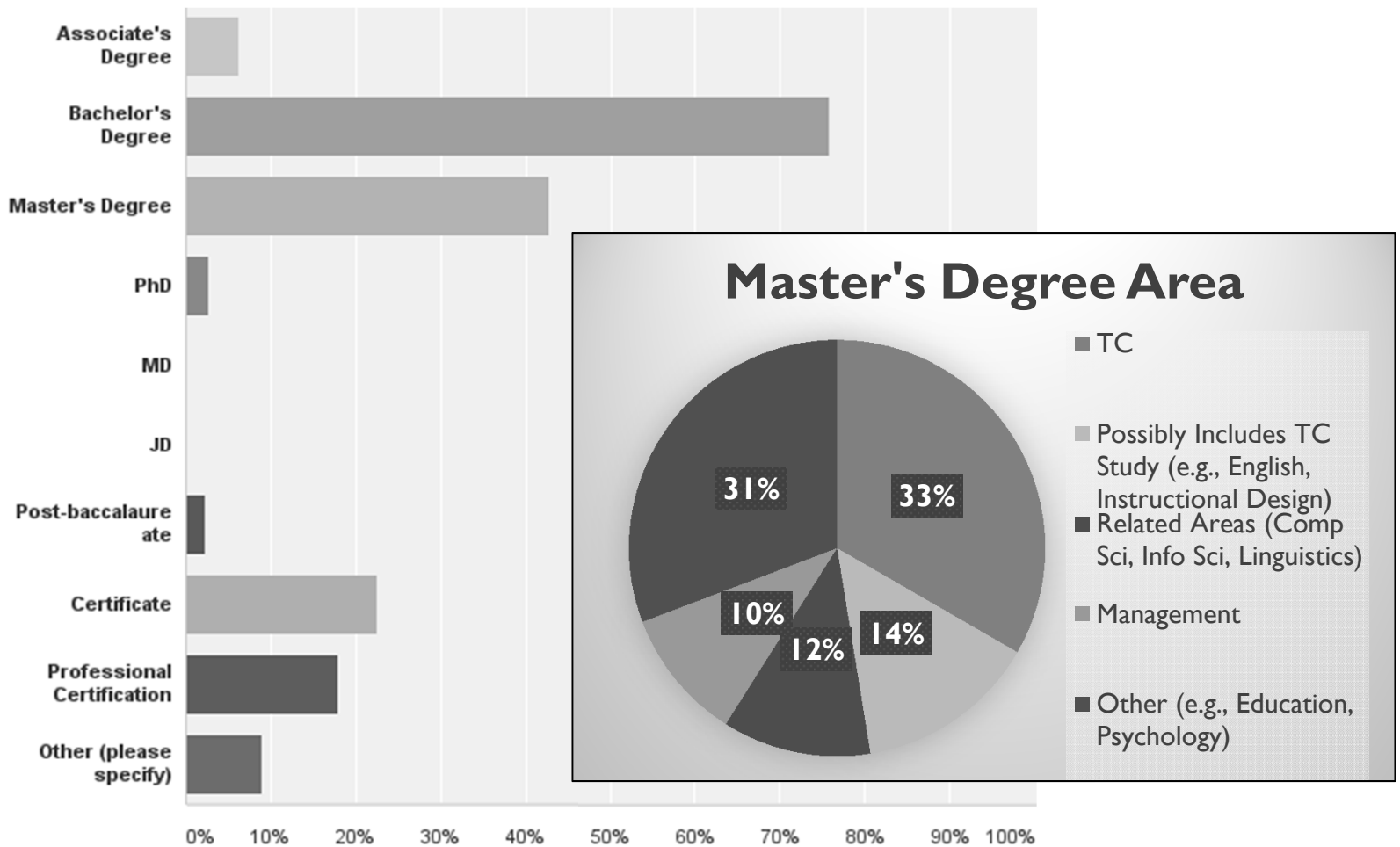
Q: How often do you read or skim the following publications in the field of technical communication? Select "Unfamiliar" if you have not heard of a publication.

Academic Pubs	Freq./ Occass.	Never/ Unfam.
Comm. Des. Qu.	3%	88%
IEEE Transactions	10.5%	68%
JBTC	4%	82%
JTWC	8%	75%
Tech. Comm.	30%	43%
Tech. Comm. Qu.	9%	77%

Trade Pubs	Freq./ Occass.	Never/ Unfam.
CIDM BP	40%	40%
CIDM e-News	40%	40%
Info Today	4.5%	88%
Intercom	30%	44%
tcworld	25%	60%

Most common cited reasons for Never/Unfamiliar
* No budget, cannot afford subscription
* No access (not a member)
* Read "more relevant" pubs outside of TC
* No time
* Read only online pubs
* Never heard of X

Survey Results

Q (paraphrased): Next to each journal article title, select your level of interest in reading the full article: Very Interested, Somewhat Interested, Not Interested

Very Interested	Not Interested
Making Memories: Writing and Designing More Memorable Documents (44%)	Using Antenarrative to Uncover Systems of Power in Mid-20th Century Policies on Marriage and Maternity at IBM (81%)
Empathetic User Design: Understanding and Living the Reality of an Audience (42%)	Stasis in Space! Viewing Definitional Conflicts Surrounding the James Webb Space Telescope Funding Debate (78%)

Very Interested
* Practical application
* Direct impact on work
* Relevant to current position/work
* Plain language

Not Interested
* Too esoteric, academic, and/or abstract
* Tied to political or social agendas
* No time to read, must prioritize
* Too specific to an area

Survey Results

Q: What changes to how academic research is designed or reported might increase the relevance, value, and/or accessibility of the research to practicing professionals?

"Suggest practical applications of research results. Research-based articles generally talk about future studies, but seldom…touch on how…results could be used by practitioners."

"Share findings online, with abstracts written in the style of magazine articles. Plain language, what's the important take-away, what's-in-it-for-me?"

Adding Value – what can you do?

As reader – find relevant, useful studies & apply results

- Journal websites
- Academia.edu, ResearchGate.net
- Open access repositories (e.g., OpenDOAR)
- Article authors & journal editors

As contributer – conduct a study, fund a study, propose a study, or offer work site for a study

- Partner with a researcher or research center (e.g., HCI at Virginia Tech, Usability Testing at Clemson)
- Contact a journal editor or section editor (e.g., case studies, tutorials)
- Contribute to research conversations
- Join review board of a journal
- Other…

Resources

- Book series in TC
  - Taylor & Francis/Routledge http://www.attw.org/publications/book-series
  - Baywood Publishing (now with Routledge) https://www.routledge.com/products/search?keywords=technical+communication&group=&category=&imprintcode
  - Oxford University Press

- Journals in TC
  - Communication Design Quarterly (open access, journal of the ACM SIGDOC)
  - Programmatic Perspectives (open access, journal of the CPTSC)
  - IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication (journal of the PCS)
  - Journal of Business and Technical Communication
  - Journal of Technical Writing and Communication
  - Technical Communication (journal of the STC)
  - Technical Communication Quarterly (journal of the ATTW)

- Professional Organizations
  - Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) SIGDOC https://sigdoc.acm.org/
  - Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) http://www.cptsc.org/
  - IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS) http://sites.ieee.org/pcs/
  - Society for Technical Communication (STC) https://www.stc.org/
  - Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) http://www.attw.org/

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