EDITORIAL FOR SPECIAL ISSUE ON DESIGNING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES

Quan Zhou
*Metropolitan State University, USA*

Guiseppe Getto
East Carolina University, USA

In the last thirty years, two trends have transformed the work of professional communicators. On the one hand, a global economy has increasingly placed professional communicators in multilingual and multicultural work environments. In such environments, cultural borders are blurred and ideas are shared across individuals and teams. On the other hand, advances in technology have revolutionized the ways communication products are produced. Design has risen to the forefront of professional communication. This special issue focuses on the intersection between designing professional communication and work within multicultural environments.

Framing this conversation is the ever-present reality of technological advancement and its effects on different cultures. Many communication products, such as organizational websites, handbooks, mobile applications, wikis, and help forums, are still designed with Western users in mind. At the same time, Internet access across the planet is increasing at an exponential rate. The ways in which users from thousands of cultures around the world access, use, and produce professional communication, however, is still an under-studied phenomenon.
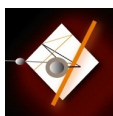
This research must go beyond simple binaries of Western culture and non-Western culture, however. We must embrace the multiplicity of cultures and contexts that professional communicators confront on a daily basis. There is a variety of promising work, especially in the past 5-10 years, that is beginning to complicate our understanding of the intersections of design and culture in important ways. This work invites us to let go of a mono-cultural model of communication that assumes all interlocutors share the same cultural foundation for making meaning. It invites us to see contemporary professional communication as happening within a complex web of value systems, lifeways, languages, technologies, and cultural proficiencies.

Featured in this issue are four articles that demonstrate the importance of this boundary-spanning scholarship.

Social responsibility of design has gained greater importance as designers tackle wicked problems that complicate the human experience as it relates to technology. These efforts are especially crucial in the developing world as people experience rapid-paced changes brought about by the introduction of Western technology. In his "Role of design education in fostering values of social responsibility in designers," Sanjeev Bothra examines India's design education efforts with regard to social responsibility. As part of his research, Bothra conducted interviews with experts and analyzed educational syllabi and documentation. His findings generated a "model of contemporary networks," in which the individual designer considers issues of the environment, governance, society, production, and consumption. Furthermore, Bothra proposes a "Filter System" for socially responsible design. Central to this system are "responsibility filters" and "ethics filters," both of which must be placed in the "modus operandi" of responsible design. His research not only identifies the lack of socially responsible design education in India, but lays out concrete models for design educators across the world.

Duin, Moses, McGrath, Tham, and Ernst use the design thinking methodology to create a technical and professional communication experience across academic cultures, disciplines, and age groups. In their "Design thinking methodology: A case study of 'radical collaboration' in the wearables research

collaboratory," they report on the work of a team of faculty, graduate research assistants, and undergraduate researchers who utilized wearable technologies (e.g., Google Glass and Google Cardboard) and the design thinking framework to study wicked problems. The researchers chose a variety of wearable tools and applied them in their own courses and projects. This iterative, collaborative, and highly energetic process described in the article generated insights on a radical collaboration model. This is a model for non-hierarchical, experiential, and cross-cultural learning in technical and professional communication. The insights from this model will be compelling to those who work with emerging technologies to enable learners to address complex problems through design thinking and intercultural communication.

In "But is that relevant here? A pedagogical model for embedding translation training within technical communication courses in the U.S.," Gonzales describes how students of a technical communication course collaborated with Michigan's Language Services Department on a tool to facilitate multilingual community work. Through the project, students learned to connect technology and language accessibility, tackle cultural representations, and build translation into the workflow of technical communicators. Building on previous scholarship on translation-related service learning, Gonzales' students focused on adapting visuals and media technologies to meet multilingual needs. Their tangible deliverables provide valuable insights for those who work on technology-mediated multilingual communication.

In "Mapping the cultural context of care: An approach to patient-centered design in international contexts," Kirk St.Amant provides a way to design culturally sensitive materials for patients in different cultures. He uses prototype theory as a mechanism to build an approach he calls "international patient experience design (I-PXD)." To take the I-PXD approach, designers analyze the context of care and identify the variables that patients encounter. St.Amant proposes that designers not only review contextual variables, but also interview individuals to understand their expected context of care. Furthermore, designers should conduct ethnographic research in the patients' context. In so

doing, patients in different cultures receive care in environments that are designed to fit their needs.

We should note that the authorship and participants in this special issue come from different cultures. Their collective conversation serves as a reminder that designing professional communication across cultures matter across and within both the global North and South. This meaningful and exciting work has only begun. The deepening of globalization and technological changes, along with their promises and perils, call for more scholarship that pushes the boundaries of professional communication. ■

About the Authors

Quan Zhou is an Associate Professor of Technical Communication and User Experience in the School of Communication, Writing, and the Arts at the Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, MN. He is the founder and director of the Design of User Experience Graduate Certificate and the Center for Design Thinking. Quan's research focuses on utilizing design thinking and design methods in information design for optimal user experience. His research has been published in Technical Communication, Communication Design Quarterly and various conference proceedings. Quan has ten years of experience in college teaching and program design, as well as industry experience at Microsoft and MSNBC.com. He holds a Ph.D. in Technical Communication from the University of Washington's Department of Human-Centered Design & Engineering.

Email. quan.zhou@metrostate.edu

Contact.
1380 Energy Lane Suite 205
St. Paul, MN 55108
USA

Guiseppe Getto is an Assistant Professor of Technical and Professional Communication at East Carolina University and is President and Founder of Content Garden, Inc., a digital marketing and UX consulting firm: http://contentgarden.org/. His research focuses on utilizing user experience (UX) design, content strategy, and other participatory research methods to help people improve their communities and organizations. The findings of his research have been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*; *Technical Communication*; *Computers and Composition*; *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization*; *Communication Design Quarterly*; and *Reflections*; as well as conference proceedings for the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Design of Communication (ACM SIGDOC). His work has also appeared in industry-based publications such as *Intercom* and *Boxes and Arrows*. He has taught at the college level for over ten years. During that time, he has also consulted and formed service-learning partnerships with many non-profits and businesses, from technical writing firms to homeless shelters to startups. He is also a poet. His first book, *Familiar History*, is currently available from Finishing Line Press: http://guiseppegetto.com/poetry/

Email. guiseppegettoatwork@gmail.com

Contact.

Bate 2108, Mail Stop 555
East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858-4353
USA