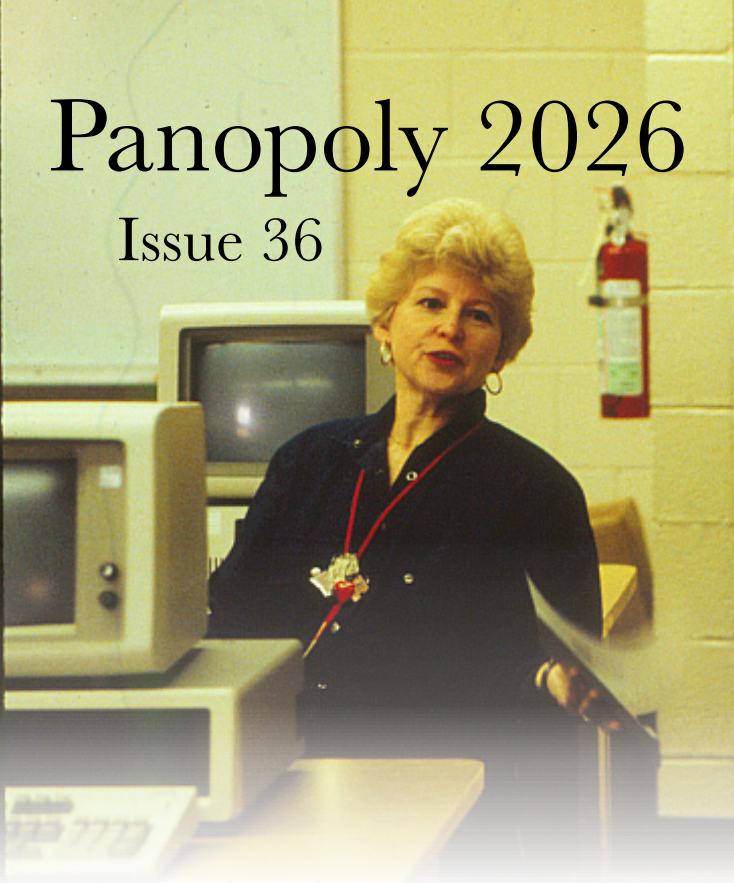


Panopoly 2026

Issue 36



Whats Inside

From the
Chair

Page 2

Faculty

Page 3

Alumni

Page 9

Department

Page 18



Reflecting on Legacy

Dr. Elizabeth Cummins Vonalt, professor of English, devoted more than three decades of her career to Missouri S&T, helping shape the Department of English and Technical Communication (ETC) and establishing lasting standards for mentorship, scholarship, and inclusion...**pg 2**

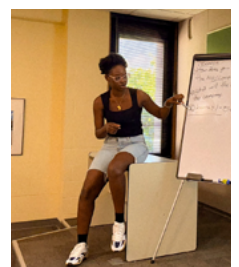
Grant Writing in Bangladesh

Early in the Spring 2025 semester, Northcut spent several weeks in Dhaka, working with faculty members at North South University (NSU). The Fulbright Specialist Program, founded in 2001, supports short-term academic and professional projects around the world...**pg 2**



Prospering Despite Rejection

For graduate students Bahar Gholinejad-Pirbazari and Nhyira Sackey, the pressure felt greater. As technical communication majors on an engineering-centered campus and as international students learning a new academic system, they faced added challenges. Gholinejad-Pirbazari is from Iran, and Sackey is from Ghana...**pg. 2**



Letter From the Chair

Writing this letter during one of the most pleasant autumn days I have experienced throughout my 13 years in Missouri, I am reminded of a line from one of my favorite authors, Henry David Thoreau: “The seasons and all their changes are in me.” In terms of welcoming change, 2025 was an exciting year for the English and Technical Communication department, as this issue of Panoply will show.

The ETC department is working on redesigning our MS degree after twenty years. Missouri S&T’s Ignition Grants for Sustainable Educational Transformation (IGSET) provided \$72,000 in funding to help develop courses that can be applied toward these efforts. We’re eager to bring our program to working professionals and others interested in developing new, highly marketable skills in an accessible asynchronous online environment.

In addition, we celebrate the rich work of our faculty. Dr. Joshua Coonrod brings his love of writing and communication to his public speaking, composition, and popular horror film courses. Dr. David Wright has been researching augmented reality using the Apple Vision Pro. His team studies the use of AR for routine tasks compared with known devices such as smart phones and laptops.

Early in 2025, Dr. Kathryn Northcut traveled to Dhaka, Bangladesh, as a Fulbright Specialist. She spent several weeks at North South University leading grant-writing workshops, applying her technical communication expertise to a global audience. In addition, MS students Nadia Ahmadi, Bahar Gholinejad-Pirbazari, and Saba Moazeni describe key questions about com-

munication that brought them to Missouri S&T and our masters’ degree program in technical communication. Nadia’s experience teaching English in Iran showed her to appreciate clarity in communication. In governmental forms, for example, clarity is key to empowerment. Bahar focuses on digital communication accessibility in Iran, hoping to improve online learning access. Meanwhile, Saba studies Iranian traditions, such as use of color and patterns, as part of a necessary element in contemporary design. We appreciate our students and look forward to where these interests will take them!

Dr. Kristine Swenson has returned to full-time faculty after having been chair of the ETC department since 2009. Thank you very much, Kris, for all your years serving the department with such grace and dedication. You’re a tough act to follow!

Finally, Dr. Brett Young joined the ETC department in Fall 2025 as assistant teaching professor. She teaches composition and our world literature survey. Welcome to the team!

We’re excited to share all of this and more of the department’s news with you. Please return the favor by sharing your news with us. Feel free to email us, drop by the Humanities and Social Sciences building, or post to our LinkedIn account. We’d love to hear from you!

Have a wonderful 2026!

~KCD

Reflecting on the Legacy of Dr. Liz Cummins

Dr. Elizabeth Cummins Vonalt, professor of English, devoted more than three decades of her career to Missouri S&T, helping shape the Department of English and Technical Communication (ETC) and establishing lasting standards for mentorship, scholarship, and inclusion. A year after Cummins's passing at age 85 in November 2024, Dr. Kate Drowne, professor of English and assistant provost for faculty affairs, reflects on her friend, colleague, and mentor's legacy.

Dr. Cummins joined the university in 1967 and later became the first woman to chair an academic department at the University of Missouri–Rolla (now Missouri S&T), leading the Department of English from 1990 to 1999. Her leadership reflected both her commitment to her discipline and her sustained work to build a more inclusive campus community.

Advocacy, Inclusion, and Institutional Change

Cummins's commitment to inclusion emerged early in her career. When she arrived on campus as an adjunct lecturer in the late 1960s, several university buildings lacked women's restrooms. She mapped restroom locations and shared them with new female faculty—a small, practical act that signaled both the realities of being a woman on the UMR campus and her intention to

make conditions better for others.

As department chair throughout the 1990s, she worked to ensure that a wider range of voices was represented. Colleagues recall that she consistently encouraged participation, visibility, and opportunity. As Drowne notes, "She was one of those people who didn't just mentor; she sponsored. She made sure others were seen, included, and given opportunities."

The university recognized "her commitment to students and her dedication to diversity" in 1997 by naming her the first recipient of UMR's Woman of the Year award. As the 2024 group photo shows, she became a cherished presence at each annual ceremony, serving as a role model and inspiration for women faculty on campus.

Even after her retirement in the early 2000s, Cummins continued to support community-building efforts. In 2007, she helped organize "Women Advancing Excellence at UMR," a day-long event designed to highlight the contributions of women faculty and strengthen their visibility. "It created a sense of belonging," Drowne recalled. "That was always her goal."

Her advocacy extended into her work with retirees as well. From 2012 to 2014, she served as the first woman president of the Miner Retirees Association and represented the campus within the University of Missouri System Retirees Leadership Association.

Her influence also endures through programs she helped inspire. Created in 2017, the Dr. Elizabeth Cummins Women's Advocate Award recognizes employees, regardless of gender, who demonstrate mentorship, advocacy, and leadership in support of women at S&T. "That award captures her perfectly," Drowne said. "It celebrates people who connect others, open doors, and make sure no one's left behind."

In 2025, Missouri S&T administratively suspended the award in response to the U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi's July 29 memo, "Guidance for Recipients of Federal Funding Regarding Unlawful Discrimination." The suspension reflected procedural compliance rather than any change



Dr. Elizabeth Cummins (center, seated) is surrounded by previous UMR/S&T Woman of the Year Award recipients at the Spring 2024 ceremony. Cummins was the university's first Woman of the Year in 1997.

in the importance of the work the award recognized.

Education, Research, Teaching, and Leadership

Before beginning her long career at Missouri S&T, Cummins earned an associate's degree from Cottey College in 1958, a bachelor's degree in English from the University of South Dakota in 1960, and a master's degree in English from the same institution in 1962. She completed her Ph.D. in English at the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign in 1985, focusing her dissertation on the works of Ursula K. Le Guin.

Her scholarship on Ursula K. Le Guin began well before her doctorate and helped shape the emerging academic study of Le Guin's work. Beginning in the late 1970s, under the last name "Cogell," she published some of the earliest peer-reviewed articles treating Le Guin as a major literary figure, work she continued in her 1985 dissertation. She went on to produce both a comprehensive scholarly bibliography, *Ursula K. Le Guin: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (1983), and a critical study, *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin* (1993), each of which became standard references for students and scholars. Her later bibliography of Judith Merrill (2007) extended this line of scholarship to another foundational writer in science fiction. Together, these publications helped establish and organize serious academic attention to authors who would become central to the field.

Her enthusiasm for teaching science fiction resonated strongly with students across the university. "Her science fiction courses always filled very quickly," said Drowne. "She loved talking with colleagues and especially students about the writers she taught, especially Le Guin. She even named her cat, Irian, after a character in one of Le Guin's stories. Students loved the energy that Dr. Cummins brought to her classrooms."

As chair of the Department of English and Technical Communication from 1990 to 1999, she played an instrumental role in hiring two ETC faculty members who are still teaching: Dr. Ed Malone in 1993, Dr. Kris Swenson in 1997, and Dr. Trent Brown (formerly Watts) in 1999. By hiring the late Dr. Linda Bergman in 1996, she advanced the department's plan to establish the university's Writing Across the Curriculum program, which in turn led to the development of a writing center, now called the Writing and Communication Center.

In the early 2000s, as a senior faculty member, Cummins continued to mentor and support ETC colleagues,

including Drowne, who joined the department in 2002. Her mentoring philosophy emphasized empathy and balance. "She made it okay to be a parent, a scholar, and a person all at once," Drowne said, recalling how Cummins encouraged young faculty to bring their children to the department when childcare was limited. "She taught us that being excellent at your job doesn't mean closing yourself off from being human."

As professor emerita, Cummins volunteered her time to support faculty careers, serving on several full-professor promotion committees, which meet a year before the promotion takes effect. She chaired Malone's committee in 2014 and was a member of Drowne's in 2015, Brown's in 2016, and Dr. David Wright's in 2020.

Her support for students continued as well. During her retirement, she served as a member of the thesis committee of M.S. student Elizabeth Roberson and took an especially active role in mentoring her as she researched and wrote "The History of Technical Communication Instruction at Missouri University of Science and Technology: The Evolution of a Curriculum" (2011). Roberson later joined the ETC faculty as a teaching professor.

Her commitment to students endures through two Larry P. Vonalt Scholarships, each awarded to a bachelor's or master's student in technical communication. Before she divided and renamed the fund, the original scholarship carried her name as well. Her husband, Dr. Larry Vonalt, also a professor of English, worked with her in the early 2000s to create the department's undergraduate and graduate degree programs in technical communication, which launched in January 2005 as complements to the English B.A. Those programs have now been in place for more than 20 years and have graduated over 200 students.

A Humanist Through and Through

Cummins strengthened Missouri S&T by supporting colleagues, guiding students, expanding the curriculum, and championing inclusion long before it had institutional language. Her steady, practical work helped others find a place in the university's story.

"She was a humanist through and through," Drowne said. "She believed that everyone belonged in the story."

Technical Communication Professor Travels to Bangladesh as a Fulbright Specialist

Technical Communication Professor Travels to Bangladesh as a Fulbright Specialist

What do a private university in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and a public university in Missouri have in common? Dr. Kathryn Northcut. A professor and grant writer at Missouri S&T, she has built a career in technical communication that combines teaching, consultation, and research. That expertise recently led to an international opportunity through the Fulbright Specialist Program.

Early in the Spring 2025 semester, Northcut spent several weeks in Dhaka, working with faculty members at North South University (NSU). The Fulbright Specialist Program, founded in 2001, supports short-term academic and professional projects around the world. While many participants choose more common destinations in Europe or South America, Northcut accepted NSU's request for assistance in strengthening grant-writing skills among its faculty.

NSU housed Northcut in an on-campus apartment, making it convenient to collaborate closely with faculty and staff. Although Dhaka has problems with pollution, trash, and poverty, the university had a beautiful



Dr. Kathryn Northcut, professor of technical communication, spent several weeks in Bangladesh as a Fulbright Specialist. She led grant-writing workshops at North South University in Dhaka.

campus that Northcut enjoyed exploring. When leaving campus, she usually had someone walk with her or had a driver. She was able to attend several local events, one of which was a conference called “Toilet: The future of Sanitation,” where she saw reports on some of the extensive work being done to address issues of hygiene and safety across the global South, by the people who live there.

Northcut's primary responsibility was to lead grant-writing workshops offered through each of NSU's four colleges. Faculty completed preparatory readings before each session and participated in activities tailored to their disciplinary needs. “Most NSU faculty are experienced in writing proposals already. All I did was give them some fresh examples, and practice using some analytic tools that were new to many of them. Just like in my proposal writing course at S&T, they practiced critique,” she said. “And they were encouraged to create a community with their colleagues for collaboration and support.”

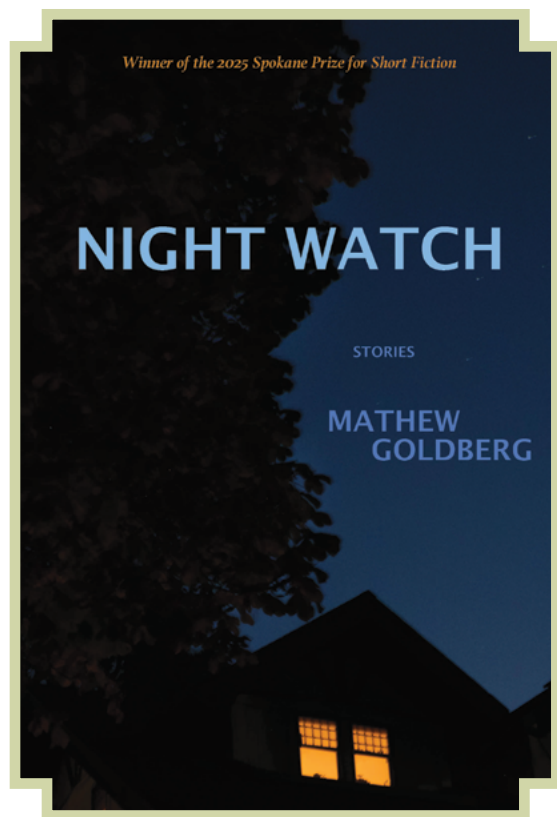
Between workshops, Northcut held office hours to provide individual feedback on grant proposals and research. One memorable exchange involved engineering students preparing proposals as part of a competition on how to improve a polluted local pond. “They were all so motivated to participate,” Northcut said. “It wasn't a requirement, but a lot of students committed to it anyway.” She was impressed by their initiative and enjoyed providing feedback on their proposals.

Northcut's experiences in Bangladesh underscored the value of cultural exchange in technical communication. “Dhaka was never a place I thought about visiting or working,” she said. “However, I gained knowledge and experience by being there that I couldn't have by going somewhere that I was more familiar with.” She learned more than expected from NSU colleagues and students and returned to Rolla with a broader perspective. In her S&T courses, she tries to help students cultivate a global perspective rather than just an American or Midwestern one.

Northcut is open to future Fulbright collaborations, although no additional travel is currently planned. The Fulbright Specialist Program maintains a network of past participants who promote opportunities and offer guidance to prospective applicants. Northcut is among them. More information about the program is available at <https://fulbrightspecialist.worldlearning.org/>.

Professor Goldberg Explores Our Desire for Connection in *Night Watch*

Mathew Goldberg, an associate teaching professor in Missouri S&T's Department of English and Technical Communication, explores what it means to seek human connection in his debut short story collection, *Night Watch* (2025).



The stories follow characters at various stages of life, each facing the same quietly urgent question: how do we understand ourselves and others more fully?

“They’re all about people searching for who they are and trying to find other people,” Goldberg says. “Like emotionally. I think that’s behind all of them.”

For Goldberg, every story begins with character. Plot, structure, and setting emerge only after he understands the people at the center of his narratives. “In any genre, what separates good fiction from mediocre fiction is strong characters,” he explains.

But crafting complex characters within the constraints of a short story poses a unique challenge that he finds both demanding and rewarding. “There’s a certain grace to a short story,” he says. “You have such an economy of space and language. It can resonate with a reader in a way that’s different from a novel. A novel you live with; in a story, there’s more subtext; it’s between the lines.”

To create that resonance, Goldberg spends time imagining his characters’ inner lives far beyond what appears on the page: their happiest moments, the fears they won’t name, the histories that shape them. Even if those details stay invisible, they give the stories an emotional foundation that readers can feel.

That depth of character development is enabled by a working method he keeps simple but disciplined: he sets aside two- to three-hour focused blocks, silences his phone, turns off Wi-Fi, and writes to music without lyrics, all to free himself from expectations and let him settle into the work.

Night Watch brings together both new and older stories, highlighting Goldberg’s evolution as a writer. “I wanted to include newer stuff because it represents where I am right now,” he says. “And then to look back over stories that I liked and really wanted to revisit.”

Revisiting earlier stories meant approaching them with fresh eyes. The stories remained anchored in their original time periods, but they were adjusted where things no longer felt quite right. “I wasn’t necessarily updating the timeframe,” he says. “Like the ones set in the past, I was going to keep in the past. But some things wouldn’t really be relevant still. And my attachment to them would change maybe a little bit too.”

Despite their differences in plot, setting, and characters, all the stories in *Night Watch* share a common thread: the difficulty and beauty of human connection. Goldberg believes that theme feels especially resonant today. “It’s more common now, with the pandemic and everything, that we feel disconnected,” he says. “It’s easier to communicate, but harder to feel in touch with people.”

Through *Night Watch*, Goldberg offers readers moments that speak to our longing for connection. They are reminders that, even in an increasingly fragmented world, we continue to reach across the distance, hoping someone is reaching back.

“In every book I’ve written, Thoreau’s somewhere to be found,” said Dr. Kathryn Dolan, professor and chair of the English and Technical Communication Department at Missouri S&T. Her long-standing admiration for the 19th-century naturalist and philosopher finds its fullest expression in her newest publication, *Henry David Thoreau and the Nick of Time: Temporality and Agency in Thoreau’s Era and Ours*, released in July 2025.

Co-edited with John J. Kuchich and Henrick Otterberg, the volume brings together fifteen essays that explore Thoreau’s work through the lenses of time and human agency. Contributors from both sides of the Atlantic offer

As co-editors, Dolan and her collaborators faced the challenge of weaving together distinct essays into a unified whole. “Each author approached Thoreau differently—philosophically, scientifically, historically,” she said. “The trick was to frame those voices so they spoke to one another. That’s what makes the book work: the differences are the point.”

Collaboration and Challenge

This project marked Dolan’s first experience co-editing a book, and it brought new lessons in teamwork and trust. “The idea of it not just being my call, but someone else’s

New Edited Collection Examines Thoreau’s Timeless Relevance

diverse perspectives on what it means to live “in the nick of time,” a phrase Thoreau himself used to describe his sense of being born at just the right historical moment.

From Iceland to Publication

The idea for the collection began in 2022, when Dolan was invited to a Thoreau conference in Iceland. “It was about thirty people giving papers—really, really good papers,” Dolan recalled. “Some of the scholars were people I had read and admired for years, and others were younger academics bringing new energy to Thoreau studies. It was this wonderful mix of perspectives.”

A few months after the conference, co-editor John Kuchich reached out with an idea: to build a book inspired by the themes that had emerged there. “He asked if I wanted to be involved,” Dolan said, “and I couldn’t say no.”

Contextualizing Thoreau’s Sense of Time

While not every essay in the collection originated from the Iceland conference, its central theme of temporality grew directly from it. “Thoreau talks about how he feels grateful to have been born in his time, and he even feels bad for those who weren’t,” Dolan explained. “That sense of being ‘in the nick of time’ became a way for all of us to explore how Thoreau and his readers experience history, change, and urgency.”

call too, was very different,” she admitted. “Sometimes I thought, ‘You’re wrong!’ But it was good. We caught each other’s mistakes, and the book is stronger for it.” The collaborative process, she said, expanded her perspective on scholarship itself. “Editing isn’t just about polishing other people’s work. It’s about building a conversation. That was a learning experience in the best possible way.”

Teaching Thoreau in a Technical World

In addition to serving as an editor, Dolan also contributed the book’s final chapter, “The Remediated World of Thoreau: A Joyful Active Learning Project.” The essay draws directly from her teaching at Missouri S&T, where she encourages students to reinterpret Thoreau’s texts through digital and creative media.



Panopoly 2026

“I have students take a Thoreau text and translate it into another form—a video, a website, an artwork—and then explain what that process taught them,” Dolan said.

“Their work really influenced my chapter. Honestly, the students here are wonderful. It’s always a treat to work with them.”

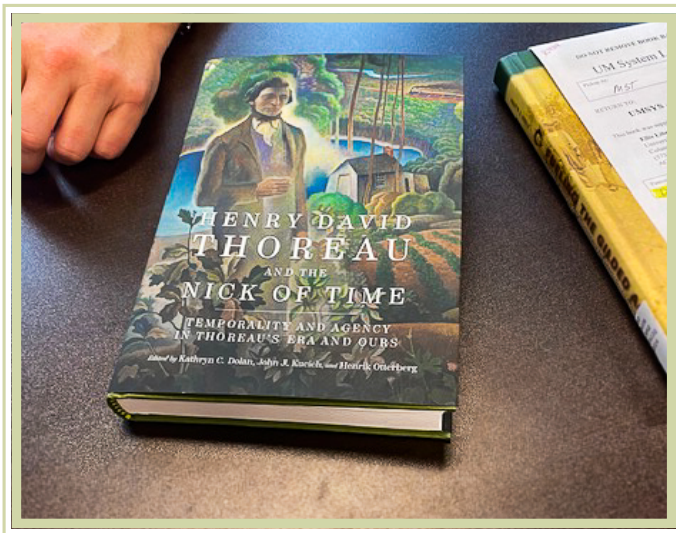
Dolan credits Missouri S&T’s STEM-focused environment with shaping her own interdisciplinary approach. “S&T is, of course, a science and tech school,” she said. “So the conversations around me are often about digital tools, communication, and innovation. That influence naturally seeps into my writing and research.”

A Scholar in Her Own Nick of Time

Reflecting on the work that led from Iceland to publication, Dolan sees Henry David Thoreau and the *Nick of Time* as both a professional milestone and a continuation of her lifelong dialogue with Thoreau. “One of the best things about being a professor,” she said, “is



Dr. Kathryn Dolan, professor and chair of English and Technical Communication, co-edited *Henry David Thoreau and the Nick of Time*, published in July 2025. The volume brings together fifteen international essays examining Thoreau’s enduring relevance and his reflections on living “in the nick of time,” a phrase he used to describe his sense of have been born at just the right historical moment.



that you’re supposed to try new, weird things you’ve never done before. That’s kind of the point. For Dolan, editing this book wasn’t just about revisiting an author she has always loved. It was about discovering new ways to think about time, teaching, and collaboration. And in true Thoreauvian spirit, she seems perfectly content to have done it all in her own “nick of time.”

Alumna Nora Potrafka Works as a Content Strategy Analyst at Mastercard



Even before the Fall 2017 semester began, Nora (Dunn) Potrafka chose English as a major because she loved communication and thought it might prepare her to be a writer or editor. A few weeks later, though, a conversation with her assigned advisor, Dr. Dan Reardon, led her to reconsider this choice.

“He encouraged me to take Introduction to Technical Communication,” Potrafka said. “He told me that tech com would bridge my love for technology and science with my communication and social skills. I enrolled in the course and, by mid-semester, decided to switch majors. I’ve stayed in tech com ever since.”

Both degree programs—the Bachelor of Arts in English and the Bachelor of Science in Technical Communication—were part of the Department of English and Technical Communication (ETC), so she spent the next five years taking ETC courses and working with ETC faculty.

Potrafka graduated with a BS in Technical Communication in Spring 2021, with minors in business, communication studies, and marketing. One year later, she

completed a Master of Science in Technical Communication after following the department’s graduate track pathway that allowed double-counting nine credit hours toward the BS and the MS.

Extracurriculars

Outside the classroom, Potrafka balanced work with a wide range of campus activities. She worked as the ETC department’s front desk receptionist throughout her undergraduate years. In that role, she coordinated with faculty to ensure syllabi were submitted on time, occasionally assisted with research projects, and answered questions from walk-in visitors.

She was also a member of Chi Omega, served on the executive board of Ignite Campus Ministry, participated in S&T’s design groups, and attended one of the university’s speech and debate competitions as an observer.

Mastercard

“Dr. Wright also shaped my path,” she said. “He encouraged me to apply to Mastercard. I ended up there because of his

encouragement.” As she prepared to graduate, Potrafka applied for two positions in the Content Strategy and Design department in Mastercard’s Global Customer Delivery & Care Division. She received a call back for one of them.

The application process involved three interviews: one with HR, one with staff in the department, and one with the hiring manager. They also requested multiple samples of work, which Potrafka selected from her technical communication courses. Her preparation showed, and she was offered the position.

Shortly after graduation, Potrafka began working as a Content Strategy Analyst at Mastercard. More specifically, she is an embedded writer. An embedded writer “means that I am dedicated to a specific program at Mastercard. Each program has different products that launch within Mastercard,” Potrafka explained. The program she supports is not publicly disclosed. Her work “is to know enough about the program and the relationships between product and engineering to make those connections.” Being an embedded writer also requires adaptability. “You have to be flexible and willing to ask questions, learn, and do research on your own.” Her day-to-day work varies considerably. “Every day looks different,” she said. “Some days, I don’t write at all because I’m in meetings from eight to four. Other days, I block out my calendar and write nonstop. I create everything from user guides and release notes to announcements and API documentation. I’ve even helped launch a new testing platform, where I gave input on usability and standards.”

Panopoly 2026

She has also taken on responsibilities she didn't anticipate. One of her biggest surprises since joining Mastercard has been becoming the Content Strategy and Design team's software expert. "I didn't realize I'd be taking on a more technical role. I thought I'd be in more of a support role, but it's opened up many learning opportunities for me. And I've really enjoyed that."

Future Plans and Goals

Since starting at Mastercard, Potrafka has remained in the same content strategy role. Although she enjoys the work, she hopes to move into product development one day, guiding a product through its early planning stages, overseeing its development, and preparing it for release to customers. That role would involve working across the full development process and ensuring that customer needs are represented at each stage.

She also hopes to author a novel. "I have a storyline in my head that I've been crafting for about a year and a half now. At some point I'll write it down and it may become published. It's definitely my creative outlet."

Advice for Students

Potrafka has advice for current ETC students. "[W]riting is a tool that sharpens over time. You become a better communicator through practice, through doing it and sitting down and having other people read it and edit it."

She also cautions them not to take feedback personally. "Editing is harsh, and everybody has an opinion and that's sometimes hard to take. Your opinions are always going to be different from whoever's reading your piece of work. It's part of our human nature. We read things differently and we have different

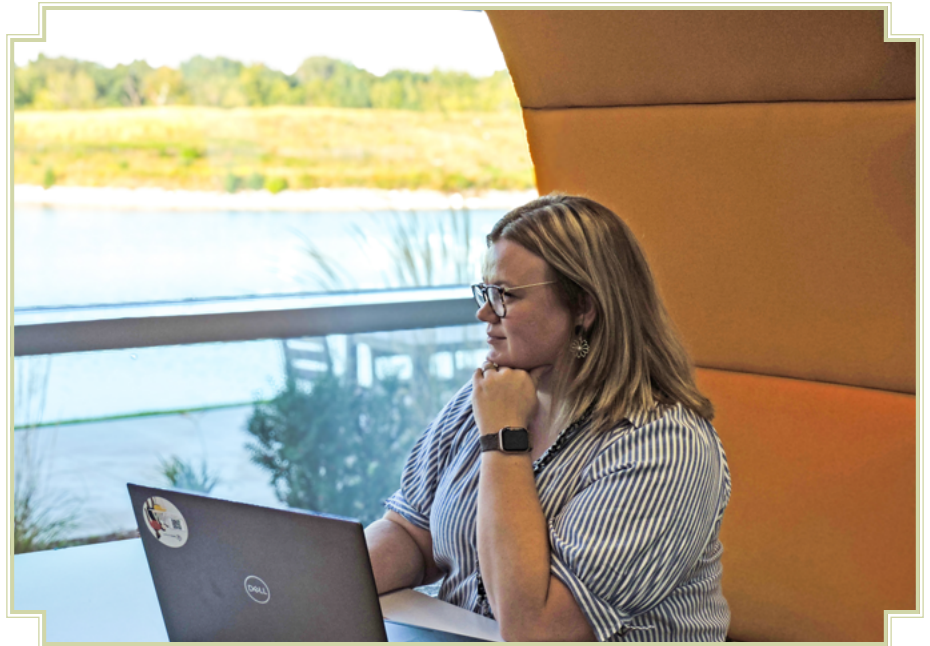
life experiences, but in technical communication writing, it's all facts."

She strongly recommends that technical communication students keep up with technology trends and learn a coding language. "Whether it's XML, CSS, HTML, or JavaScript, having that foundation helps. The syntax may not be the same,

but there's some translation that matches up. It's knowledge that you can take to any job."

Staying Connected to S&T

Potrafka lives in St. Louis now and still finds S&T alumni everywhere. "There are so many S&T alumni at Mastercard. I can usually find one wherever I turn in St. Louis. My



Nora Potrafka (shown here on Mastercard's campus in O'Fallon, Missouri) encourages students to stay current with technological advancements and to learn a coding language. She believes that foundation carries well into any technical environment.

Technical Communications Alumna Leads S&T Advising Center

As director of Missouri S&T's Advising Center, Amy McMillen (MS Tech Com, 2020) ensures that the center provides high-quality, student-centered academic advising that supports the needs of S&T students. Her work is built on clear communication, teamwork, and a real care for student success.

went on to graduate with a 3.9 GPA. Her graduate studies helped her learn how to communicate and support students more effectively. "I've learned to use communication to establish a better rapport with my students and by getting to know them as people first, rather than just as students, I can help them more in my job."

As she began the certificate program, she transitioned to the Advising Center as a senior academic advisor, applying her growing communication expertise to



Amy McMillen works with advisee Jimmy Odom, a computer engineering major.

Since beginning her career at Missouri S&T in 1996, McMillen has served students in a variety of advising and support roles, except for a seven-year gap at a regional planning commission that strengthened her communication and project management skills. After returning to campus in 2014 as a graduate studies advisor, she entered the technical communication graduate certificate program in 2017 and later applied that coursework toward an MS degree (2019–2020). She had her moments of doubt and uncertainty about whether she should continue with her education, but a conversation with Dr. Ed Malone, professor of technical communication, kept her from dropping out, and she

strengthened student support and assumed greater leadership responsibilities.

While working as senior academic advisor, McMillen was involved in the University of Missouri System's Advisor Development Program (ADP), a collaborative initiative through which she exchanged advising techniques and explored new approaches to student support. She also mentored and supported advisors who later presented their projects at conferences such as NACADA, the global community for academic advising. She remains involved with the program, representing Missouri S&T on the ADP Planning Committee.

In January 2022, McMillen became Director of the

Panopoly 2026



Amy McMillen, shown here in her office, leads S&T's Advising Center. She is a graduate of the MS program in technical communication.

S&T Advising Center. She manages a group of academic advisors, an assistant, and a team of student mentors, helping to sustain and strengthen a student-centered environment at the University. Her leadership in the center allows it to grow programs that foster academic success, unity, and professional development for advisors and students.

In her first three years as director, McMillen oversaw the On Track Academic Success Program, a peer-led initiative designed to support students on academic probation. During that period, participating students raised their GPAs by nearly a full point on average.

Her philosophy of leadership is collaboration and empathy. "If you don't have a great team, you can't be a great leader." She believes that many of today's challenges can be solved with effective communication, something that guides both her advising and her leadership.

McMillen enjoys meeting students where they are and helping them reach their goals. She believes that every student is unique and different. "I remember I saw a meme, it was a bag of popcorn, and it said you can put kernels in the same pan with the same heat, but they all pop at different times. That's how I try to approach working with my students." She encourages students to ask for help when needed and ensures it is seen as a sign of strength, not weakness.

For Technical Communication students, McMillen advises that they should recognize the power of communication. "I would give everyone that piece of advice: communicate with other people, learn as much as you can." She encourages them to practice effective and efficient communication. She also enjoys being part of Missouri S&T's diverse community and finds inspiration in the

ideas students share.

Just as she supports her students and colleagues, McMillen cherishes the close connections within her own family. She has two adult sons and a grandson who always brings joy when they gather. Family remains a central part of her life.

Professional Experience

1996–2006

Secretary, Regional Professional Development Center,
Missouri S&T

Senior Secretary, Alumni Association, Missouri S&T

2007–2014

Environmental Program Specialist & Project Manager,
Meramec Regional Planning Commission (Region I
Homeland Security grants)

2014–2016

Graduate Studies Specialist/Advisor, Office of Graduate
Studies

2016–2021

Senior Academic Advisor, Missouri S&T Advising Center

2022–present

Director, Missouri S&T Advising Center, and Assistant
Director of Student Support Services, Missouri S&T

When Annmarie Tyson tells people she works at Tyson Foods, they often assume she is related to the Tysons behind the multinational food brand. The shared last name was just a happy coincidence. It was her skills, not her surname, that earned her a place at Tyson Foods. Today, Tyson is a product owner in the company's IT organization—full-time employment that followed a successful internship. Her work connects directly to her two degrees in technical communication.

From Internship to Full-Time Employment
Her connection to Tyson Foods began when she was still an undergraduate, through an initial conversation at the S&T career fair. She joked during her interview that she applied because of her last name, but she also explained the value of technical communication to a company that was not initially seeking someone in her field. "Oh yeah, we can put you anywhere with those skills," the recruiter said. That conversation ultimately led to an internship with the company.

Internship Leads Alumna to Full-Time Position at Tyson Foods

Education at Missouri S&T

Tyson began her S&T education as a civil engineering major, but a required technical communication course persuaded her to change majors. She joined the technical communication program and later added a minor in Spanish.

"The classes were hard, but you work hard and build the skills that help you later on," she said.

As an undergraduate, Tyson participated widely in campus activities. She competed in track and field, qualifying for the 2022 NCAA Division II Outdoor Championships in the high jump and earning second place at the GLVC Indoor Championships that same year. She also worked as a resident assistant, served as a student success coach, and joined the photography club, where she often took part in group photo walks.

While still an undergraduate, Tyson enrolled in S&T's graduate track pathway program, which allowed her to count nine shared credits toward a future master's degree. She graduated with a BS in English and Technical Communication in May 2022 and immediately began work on a master's.

"I went ahead and got the MS because my parents always said if I wanted one it would be easier while I was still young and life/work wasn't in the way." She also taught classes as a graduate teaching assistant until she graduated in May 2023.

From June 2021 through August 2022, she worked on Tyson Foods' IT Finance Team, gaining experience with new systems, including SAP. When a need arose, she also stepped in as a project manager for several weeks. Her internship performance impressed them and led to a full-time job offer before graduation.

After she graduated with her master's degree in May 2023, Tyson joined the company's IT Value Management Office, initially working as an applications analyst before advancing to her current position as product owner.

In her applications analyst role, she supported the company's project-management tools through documentation, training, and user assistance. She created support materials, developed internal communications for the IT project management office, and helped implement system updates driven by new rules, data requirements, or regulatory changes.

As a product owner, she supports two major project-management applications, Jira and Clarity PPM, which are used across the company's IT and HR teams. "My day to day includes support activities, training users, project management, and supporting our developers as they complete the enhancements on our product roadmap," she said. Her responsibilities also include leading training sessions, providing technical support for the tools and related hardware, and helping her team follow Agile practices.

Professional and Community Engagement

Outside of her role at Tyson Foods, she contributes to technology-focused organizations in Northwest Arkansas.

She served as marketing and communications director for Girls in Tech NWA from March 2024 to January 2025, where she created and shared social media and membership communications.

She also served as a mentor with InnovateHER from May 2024 to May 2025. “I participated in a year-long mentorship program where I support and guide an individual as they moved through a program. In this program the mentees acquire tech certifications, attend technology speaker sessions, and learn about the industry.”

Tyson’s academic preparation and campus involvement strengthened both her skills and confidence. They positioned her well for the responsibilities she now has at Tyson Foods. Her academic success gave her the confidence to succeed in a demanding professional environment because, as she put it,

*“If I could do it
at S&T...*



Annmarie Tyson (MS Tech Com, SP23) participated in a panel for the Women+ in Technology of Northwest Arkansas during their annual conference on July 9, 2024, held at Ozark Beer Company in Rogers, Arkansas. The session, titled “AI Today and What’s to Come,” brought together local technology professionals to discuss current trends and future developments in artificial intelligence.

I could do it anywhere.”

Alumna Snehal Shirke Helps Computer Science Students Think Like Users



Snehal Shirke, a 2016 graduate of our MS program, is studying how students interact with AI-assisted learning tools as part of her Ph.D. research in human-computer interaction.

After seven years at Kennesaw State University, Snehal Shirke (MS Tech Com, SP16) has moved into a new role as Senior Lecturer in Georgia Tech's School of Computing Instruction. She teaches technical communication to computer science majors, an audience whose needs match her long-standing interest in usability, user research, and human-computer interaction.

Shirke describes the role as a natural fit. She had not been actively job hunting, but when the opportunity surfaced, the combination of location and curriculum caught her attention. "They wanted someone to establish a technical communication course specifically for computer science," she explained. "That aligns directly with my interest in user research, UX, and UI development. It felt like the right match."

Adjusting to a New Environment

Shirke began the position this fall and is still settling into her new academic home. She immediately noticed Georgia Tech's scale and instructional structure. She teaches a 75-student course supported by seven undergraduate TAs, an instructional model she had not experienced before. "I was used to twenty-something classes at Kennesaw," she said. "Here, large classes are necessary because the enrollment numbers are so high, and they use a big TA network to support that. It is impressive to see how they manage it."

That scale required adjustments. She now coordinates TA work, mentors them through grading and student issues, and adapts assignments designed for much larger classrooms. "It is a shift toward more managerial responsibilities," she said. "I am still learning, but it is a good challenge." Research in Human-Computer Interaction

Alongside her teaching, Shirke has begun a Ph.D. in Computer Science at Georgia State University with a research focus on human-computer interaction. Her long-term goal is to contribute to more accessible, user-centered technologies.

"What motivates me is that eventually I will get to do research in my interest area: user research in computer science," she said. Accessibility is central to this work. "I want to explore strategies that

make technology usable for all types of users."

She is already working on a collaborative project at Georgia Tech, examining AI-assisted learning tools. The study compares how undergraduate and graduate students perform with an AI-supported assignment. "It is a small-stakes activity, but it helps us understand how different groups use emerging tools in the classroom," she explained.

A self-described early adopter, Shirke follows new technologies closely. She is especially interested in how users judge the trustworthiness and usability of rapidly developing tools. "Having a structured research program now gives me a space to pursue these questions in a more official way," she said.

Teaching Technical Communication to CS Majors

Shirke's teaching draws heavily on project-based learning and reflects trends in both industry and academic research. Her courses often involve semester-long projects in which students test their apps or prototypes with real users, an approach that helps them recognize the gap between expert and novice understanding.

"Engineers and computer scientists sometimes don't realize that other people may not understand their code or their design choices," she said. "They don't realize they're

being too technical, because they're breathing technology every day. When they test a prototype and see a user struggle to find a feature they assumed was obvious, that realization is valuable."

Student responses vary. Some embrace user-centered thinking, while others resist, probably in the class only because it's required. "But I try to show them the importance of making technology accessible to everyone," she said.

She directs students to reliable sources such as the Nielsen Norman Group and connects course ideas to practice by sharing examples from industry. "Students respond better when they see that the material connects to real practice," she said.

From Pune to Rolla to a Career in Technical Communication

Born and raised in India, Shirke attended the University of Pune (now Savitribai Phule Pune University), earning a bachelor's degree in zoology in 2005 and an MBA in human resources in 2009. While working in HR, she found herself drawn to writing employee communications and designing internal web portals, so she decided to go back to school—and halfway around the world—for a second master's degree, this time in technical communication.

Although she considered several U.S. programs, she chose Missouri S&T because it had a STEM focus and offered her funding. "S&T is an engineering school, and that appealed to me," she said. She also liked what she saw on the department's website, particularly its emphasis on usability and international technical communication.

She began her studies at S&T in August 2014. As a graduate teaching assistant, she taught one section of English 3560 Technical Writing each semester while building a strong foundation in the discipline through her own coursework. She especially valued Advanced International Technical Communication, History of Technical Communication, and Teaching Technical Communication for the perspectives they offered. Her favorite course, though, was Usability Studies, which connected directly to the user-centered design principles that continue to interest her.

Working under Dr. Kathryn Northcut's supervision, Shirke completed a thesis titled *Yik Yak Posts: A Discourse Analysis*. She credits Northcut, Dr. Ed Malone, and Dr. David Wright with shaping her future teaching and research. "I still use many of their strategies in my classroom," she said. "A large part of my career, I owe to them."

Looking back, she regards the program as both rigorous and supportive, with opportunities that extended beyond coursework. "The program is outstanding, and the extracurriculars, like design teams, are valuable too. I thoroughly enjoyed my two years there."

Career Growth in Wisconsin and Georgia

After graduating from S&T in May 2016, Shirke taught as a full-time Communication Instructor at Southwest Wisconsin Technical College. Her teaching responsibilities included a wide variety of courses, such as written communication, technical reporting, oral and interpersonal communication, and speech. At S&T, she had taught juniors and seniors, always in the same course. "They were already very motivated and they were really serious about

their studies. They would turn in their assignments on time and things like that." In Wisconsin, she encountered a very different student population, many arriving directly from high school. The courses were more general, the students were younger, and she had to adjust quickly.

Seeking career advancement, Shirke went on the job market again, and in 2018, she accepted a Lecturer position at Kennesaw State University in the Atlanta metropolitan area, where she spent seven years and earned promotion to Senior Lecturer while teaching technical writing, productivity tools, and user assistance. "Kennesaw was a great place to grow as a lecturer," she said. "I experimented with different assignments, including some I learned at S&T, and the students responded well."

Although her new position at Georgia Tech is exciting, she will always have fond memories of Kennesaw, because her time there was foundational to her development as a teacher. Like her earlier move from S&T to the college in Wisconsin, the transition from Kennesaw to Georgia Tech has been accompanied by its own shift in classroom culture. One difference, in particular, has stood out.

A Lesson in Humility

As a top-tier school, Georgia Tech attracts high achievers. Many of Shirke's students have impressive accomplishments, such as high test scores and national awards. What stands out, she said, is how little they draw attention to their accomplishments. Their modesty has made an impression on her. "They're very humble," she said. "It keeps me humble too. Good work speaks for itself."

Proposed Restructuring Would Reshape Humanities at Missouri S&T

Missouri S&T is planning a major reorganization of its humanities programs. A proposal now under Faculty Senate review outlines a plan to restructure the Department of Arts, Languages, and Philosophy (ALP) into three new academic units, including the integration of the university's language programs (such as Spanish) into the Department of English and Technical Communication (ETC). If approved, the change would be a major step in redefining how the humanities connect with science, technology, and society at S&T.

Reimagining the Humanities Dean Mehrzad Boroujerdi's proposal envisions three focused departments that would replace ALP's current structure: Science and Technology Policy, combining philosophy with political and environmental science; Arts and Technology, bringing together visual and performing arts; and English and Technical Communication with Languages, uniting writing, reading, speech, translation, and intercultural

This restructuring follows national trends at STEM-focused universities such as Georgia Tech and the Colorado School of Mines, where communication and global literacy are embedded within technical education. For ETC, the addition of the language faculty and courses would broaden the department's focus from technical and professional communication to include greater attention to cross-cultural and global dimensions. The department has long offered undergraduate and graduate courses in international technical communication, and the Speech and Media Studies curriculum, now part of ETC, includes a course in intercultural communication.

Why Languages and Why Now

Enrollment in S&T language courses in Spanish, French, German, and Russian has declined in recent years, and upper-level classes often enroll only a few students. ETC has experienced its own enrollment challenges. The proposal argues that merging the two areas would create stability, preserve faculty positions, and expand student options. Whether it could solve the enrollment challenges is an open question.

The plan also highlights the intellectual connections between writing and language instruction. Many language faculty already teach literature, culture, and composition, areas that complement ETC's expertise.

A unified department could develop new credentials such as global communication, technical translation, and intercultural leadership, blending cultural and professional competencies that employers increasingly value.

Faculty and Governance

Shared governance has guided

the process from the beginning. Surveys conducted in 2025 reportedly showed strong support among ALP faculty for restructuring, and ETC faculty were invited to provide feedback before the Faculty Senate's vote in spring 2026. The proposal follows University of Missouri System procedures that emphasize transparency and faculty consultation.

Within ETC, discussion has focused on preserving the department's strengths while embracing the broader mission that the language faculty and programs would bring. "We already teach communication in English and across technical contexts," one faculty member said. "Now we can think more broadly about communication across cultures."

A Student-Centered Future

For students, the reorganization promises greater access to a wide range of humanities courses while maintaining existing degree programs. Language courses would continue to meet general education requirements but within a department that can provide stronger institutional support. The merger could also lead to new interdisciplinary opportunities in digital storytelling, global teamwork, and intercultural design that connect directly to S&T's technological focus.

Looking Ahead

If approved in spring 2026, the reorganization would take effect in the 2026–27 academic year or the following year. Planning teams are already considering curriculum alignment and departmental governance. Regardless of the outcome, the proposal has sparked meaningful reflection on the role of the humanities in a science and engineering university.

For ETC, the goal remains clear: to help students communicate clearly, ethically, and globally. As one student observed after a recent public-speaking showcase, "What we learn here isn't just how to write. It's how to be understood."

Reardon Joins the CASE Administrative Team as Associate Dean

He has been described as the perfect Scrooge: “crabby, crusty, and caustic.”

Dr. Dan Reardon, former Vice Provost of Undergraduate Studies at Missouri S&T, spent the Spring 2025 semester back in his home department, English and Technical Communication, before departing once more for a new administrative role:

to the Rolla area—not for academic careers, but to start a fragrance manufacturing business, Creative Essence. Until its quietus in 2018, it had an annual operating budget of approximately \$1 million.

For Reardon, technical communication represents the intersection of creativity, clarity, and connection.



Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education.

From Kansas City to Campus Leadership

Reardon’s path to academic leadership has been anything but typical. A Kansas City native, he grew up near Raytown, while his wife, Beth, hails from nearby Fairway, Kansas. Their son, William, was also born in Kansas City, rooting the family firmly in the Midwest.

Before joining Missouri S&T full-time, Reardon spent nearly 15 years teaching at the University of Missouri–Kansas City while also serving as primary caregiver for their son. In 2002, the family moved

Reardon began teaching part-time at the University of Missouri–Rolla (now Missouri S&T) in 2003 and moved to full-time status in 2007. He entered the tenure track in 2011, earning promotion to associate professor with tenure in 2017 and full professor in 2023. Along the way, he advanced through several leadership positions, including assistant director of the writing center, associate chair of English and Technical Communication, and vice provost of undergraduate studies.

A Leader Who Lifts Others Up

In his current role, Reardon supports Dean Mehrzad Boroujerdi and collaborates closely with department chairs. “What I like best about my job,”

he shared, “is helping other people do theirs more effectively.” From solving challenges to guiding faculty through administrative needs, he views his position as one that enables others to succeed.

Beyond leadership, he continues to nurture his love for the classroom. Each semester, Reardon teaches a course—currently his favorite, Fantasy Literature—keeping him connected to students and the teaching experience that first sparked his career.

A Family Legacy at Missouri S&T

The Reardons’ connection to Missouri S&T runs deep. Reardon’s wife, Beth, serves as the university’s Canvas learning management system expert and coordinator for educational software programs. With a master’s degree in technical communication from S&T, Beth helps faculty develop their online courses and learning materials.

Their son, William, also followed the S&T path, completing both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in technical communication through the graduate-track-pathway program. Today, he works remotely for Hitachi on Google’s Guardian AI team, developing natural and human-like language systems and even teaches part-time at S&T. “They make me look good because they’re the ones doing the hard work,” Reardon joked proudly.

Theater in His Blood

Many years ago, Reardon earned a BA in Speech and Theatre from Avila College in Kansas City. Even as his studies shifted toward English literature, he remained deeply involved in theater work. “With a theatrical career spanning decades, he has worn nearly every hat—from director to set, light, and sound designer, stage manager, and carpenter,” noted a press release from the Cedar Street Players in Rolla.

He boasts 14 acting credits since 2018, ranging from bit parts to lead roles. For Fine Linen Theatre and Ozark Actors Theatre in Rolla, he portrayed Lazar Wolf in *Fiddler on the Roof* (2018), Mr. Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice* (2020), and Maurice in *Beauty and the Beast* (2024). His standout role, however, was as Ebenezer Scrooge in his own stage adaptation

of *A Christmas Carol*. Reviewer Paige Timer of the Phelps County Focus called him “everything you want Scrooge to be—crabby, crusty, and caustic.”

The Power of Communication

When speaking about his passion for English and technical communication, Reardon emphasizes its versatility and impact. He often encourages students to ask employers one key question: “Are you hiring communication specialists?” Nearly every company answers affirmatively with enthusiasm.

“Technical communication covers everything from graphic design to digital media,” he explained. His upcoming book explores the evolution of instruction manuals in video games—from printed guides to digital tutorials and Let’s Play videos. “It’s a fascinating look at how players now teach players through digital media,” he said.

For Reardon, technical communication represents the intersection of creativity, clarity, and connection.

“Our graduates are the experts who make what manufacturers do understandable and marketable to customers,” he said. “It’s the best of all possible worlds in communication.”

Why Have So Many MS Graduates Continued Their Studies at Clemson? Alumni Point to Faculty, Curriculum, and Shared Ethos

The Department of English and Technical Communication (ETC) has been offering a Master of Science in Technical Communication since 2005. Most of the program's 112 graduates to date have taken jobs in industry, and only about 10 have gone on for doctoral study—to schools such as Texas Tech, Virginia Tech, and Georgia State. A recent pattern has emerged: a notable concentration at one East Coast school.

that balances theory and practice, and a shared ethos between the two schools that values technology, culture, and ethics in human-centered communication.

Faculty Mentorship That Inspires Further Study

Every one of the interviewed alumni points to the Missouri S&T faculty as a defining influence on their academic trajectory. For them, the program's



Five alumni are now pursuing advanced degrees at Clemson University: Oluwafemi (“Femi”) Osho (MS SP21), Acheme “Chris” Acheme (MS FS21), Joy Amponsah (MS FS21), Jude Enete (MS SP24), and Felix Nyikwagh (MS SP24). Their convergence at one institution raises an intriguing question: What motivated so many S&T-trained communicators to continue their education at Clemson?

One factor, of course, is Clemson’s willingness to admit and fund our MS graduates, creating a pipeline that strengthens as those students thrive and share their experiences with peers. But the alumni themselves point to other influences: mentorship from ETC faculty, an MS curriculum

professors were not only instructors but models of careful inquiry, clear communication, and openness to others’ perspectives.

Nyikwagh, now pursuing a Ph.D. in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design, describes how “faculty like Dr. Edward Malone, Dr. Carleigh Davis, Dr. David Wright, and Dr. Kathryn Northcut encouraged independent thinking and intellectual rigor.” Their mentorship, he says, “was the reason I transitioned smoothly into doctoral study.” He added that success in graduate school depends on taking initiative outside of coursework, something he practiced as an active member and later president of S&T’s student chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

Enete, also a Ph.D. student in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design, entered the master's program expecting a focus on practical writing but found more theoretical depth than he anticipated. He pointed to Dr. Ed Malone's History of Technical Communication course as an example, noting that it explored "how historical knowledge informs practice." The course traced communication technologies from clay tablets and papyrus scrolls to contemporary digital systems and included hands-on work with Vasont Inspire, a component content management system. Although the course was online, it remained interactive. "Dr. Malone's mentorship was one of the reasons I pursued dual master's degrees, completing both Geology & Geophysics and Technical Communication at S&T," he said.

Osho, now pursuing a Ph.D. in Human-Centered Computing, recalls that instructors like Dr. Wright and Dr. Hercula "emphasized that communication should never be detached from the audience or purpose." They "instilled in me the habit of thinking across disciplines." Those values continue to shape his current research in human-centered computing at Clemson. He also noted that balancing doctoral research with raising four children, while his spouse pursues a Ph.D. of her own, has required the adaptability and resilience he began developing at S&T.

A Curriculum That Balances Praxis and Theory

If mentorship lit the spark, the Missouri S&T curriculum provided the kindle. Alumni consistently describe their S&T coursework as an ideal balance between theoretical inquiry and hands-on design.

For Nyikwagh, "Theoretical Approaches to Technical Communication was transformative" because "it exposed me to the breadth of rhetorical theory, from classical to feminist and actor-network approaches, helping me analyze how meaning circulates through texts, visuals, and technologies." At the more applied end of the curriculum, he cited Advanced Layout and Design, where he merged "creativity with usability" through the Panopoly newsletter project, learning to use InDesign to produce a real-world publication.

Enete also cited Advanced Layout and Design and the Panopoly project, where he saw how "rhetorical

analysis and layout design can intersect to create meaningful visual communication."

Under Dr. David Wright's guidance, Acheme conducted a usability analysis for a Nigerian startup's mobile app, work that the company later implemented. The experience, he says, showed that "academic work could have real-world impact."

For Acheme, now completing an M.S. in Computer Engineering at Clemson, Dr. Hercula's Advanced Writing for Science and Engineering was pivotal. "It was in her class that I began to see writing as a process of inquiry rather than a task of translation," he recalled.

This integration of theory and practice showed alumni that technical communication is not merely a service skill but a field of research in its own right. Clemson's programs, with their strong research culture and interdisciplinary openness, provided a natural next step. Several alumni also remarked that the intellectual independence they developed at S&T helped them adapt to the expectations of doctoral study, which include heavier reading loads, greater demands for originality, and more responsibility for shaping their own research paths.

A Shared Ethos of Human-Centered Communication

Perhaps the most striking through line between Missouri S&T and Clemson is a shared philosophy: both institutions emphasize communication as a human-centered activity informed by technology, ethics, and culture. Moreover, Clemson's strengths in areas such as Human-Centered Computing and Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design aligned well with the alumni's developing research interests.

Osho's research, funded through two NSF projects, explores inclusive computing education and AI-related cybersecurity training. A certified ethical hacker and former cybersecurity lecturer, he brings significant professional experience to this work. His focus on human-centered computing reflects lessons from S&T about "how to humanize data and systems," a theme that also runs through Clemson's Human-Centered Computing program. His work exemplifies one way S&T alumni carry human-centered thinking into advanced research.

Before graduate school, Enete co-founded Nestuge, a Nigerian digital-product platform, and he has played an active role in the startup ever since. That work showed him how cultural expectations affect user experience—an insight that led him to Missouri S&T, where he first practiced the principles that now guide his doctoral research. "Technology design must adapt to local contexts rather than imitate Western frameworks," he explained. His commitment to culturally responsive design reflects another dimension of the shared ethos: attention to ethics, context, and global awareness.

With BA and MA degrees in theatre arts from universities in Nigeria, Nyikwagh brings a humanities-inflected perspective to his work, exploring how digital storytelling and rhetorical design can foster social well-being. His transition from usability studies at S&T to cultural rhetoric at Clemson illustrates how both programs value communication as civic engagement, not simply a professional skill but a moral practice. Where Enete emphasizes cultural design, Nyikwagh highlights the social responsibilities of communicators.

Even Acheme, whose work sits closer to engineering, sees continuity between his two academic homes. With a background in electrical and electronic engineering and now pursuing an MS in Computer Engineering at Clemson, he continues to build on his technical foundation as a Graduate Research Assistant. "The professors at S&T genuinely cared about our growth," he says. "Their quick responses, constructive feedback, and encouragement went beyond the classroom. That supportive culture taught me that effective communication is not just

about clarity but about connection." He has found that his studies at Clemson require a similar culture of collaboration, especially when navigating the uncertainties of a self-directed research program.

Continuity of Mission

Taken together, these alumni stories suggest a continuum between Missouri S&T and Clemson University, one built on shared values rather than coincidence. Both programs treat communication as a space where writing, design, and technology come together to serve human needs.

Missouri S&T provided the foundation through faculty mentorship, rigorous coursework, and a philosophy of ethical design. Clemson offers the opportunity to extend that foundation through interdisciplinary research. The result is a growing network of S&T-trained scholars who are contributing to the future of communication studies. For many, Clemson's alignment with their interests in cultural rhetoric, UX, and human-centered computing made it the best fit, even as they acknowledged the challenges that accompany the transition to doctoral work.

As Nyikwagh puts it,

"The Ph.D. journey demands more than academic intelligence, it requires resilience, curiosity, and self-direction." Those qualities, cultivated at Missouri S&T, continue to thrive at Clemson and show that good communication education does more than prepare students for the next job. It prepares

The Sun Also Sets: The Last BA English Graduates Mark the End of an Era

In December 2025, our department celebrated the graduation of the final two students in the Bachelor of Arts in English program: Madison Kastner and Haley Eggers. Both completed the secondary education track and are now certified to teach high school English in Missouri. While their graduations marked the conclusion of the English BA as a

18-year-olds have no clue what is best for them in the long term, and I find the elimination of generalist and liberal arts degrees these days is a terrible shame.” He hopes that the BS degree program “contains sufficient exposure to the arts and literature—such that communication and critical thinking skills are developed, exposure to



degree program, students will continue to have the opportunity to earn English teaching certification through the department’s Bachelor of Science in English and Technical Communication.

Established in 1967, the English BA was the department’s oldest major program and, for many years, its academic cornerstone. Over the decades, it prepared hundreds of students for careers in education, writing, publishing, and other communication fields. These graduates continue to make their mark in classrooms and communities across Missouri and around the country.

Andrew Vogt, a 2005 graduate of our English BA program, went on to earn master’s degrees in writing and international education. He is now Program Coordinator of Graduate and International Programs at the George Washington University Law School. Writing from Istanbul, he said, “Many

other cultures and philosophies is gained, and the next generation is prepared not just for the job marketplace but for life.”

Gina Chambers graduated from our English BA program in 2007. “The elimination of the program is sad,” she said. “In a way, it feels like the passing of an old friend.” Chambers earned a master’s degree in

**“My English degree is
the cornerstone of my
career in education”**

education from Drury in 2011; she is now the PK–12 Principal for the Cranfills Gap Independent School District in Texas.

Panopoly 2026

“I was sad to learn of the English BA’s elimination,” said Mary Helen Stoltz, who graduated with the degree in 1995. “I learned so much from the English department faculty who were here in the early 1990s, and my degree has served me well. However, I can certainly see a benefit to earning a BS instead of a BA. I hope this decision allows the department to grow and continue to flourish.” Stoltz is now Editorial Director of Strategic Communications in Missouri S&T’s Office of Marketing and Communications.

Robert Haselwander, a 2005 graduate of our English BA program and a former lecturer in our department, said his undergraduate degree gave him “an introduction to critical thinking, a deeper understanding of the importance of story, and a view of the wider world.” Several graduate degrees later, Dr. Haselwander is now a geographer with the United States Geological Survey in Rolla. “I



have every confidence that the faculty will continue to rigorously educate new students about the old essential skills. Adding more skills to the students’ toolboxes should only provide them with more opportunities.”

In 2021, the English BA was officially combined

with the Bachelor of Science in Technical Communication, established in 2005, to create the Bachelor of Science in English and Technical Communication. The merger reflected a recognition that students benefit from a curriculum integrating traditional humanistic inquiry with the practical communication skills sought in today’s workplaces. After the merger, both the English BA and the Technical Communication BS remained active for their remaining majors, but no new students were admitted to either program.

Within the last decade, many universities have eliminated their English majors, including Missouri Western State University, Dickinson State University, Lasell University, Emporia State University, Marymount University, and Lesley University. In February 2023, The New Yorker magazine published an article titled “The End of the English Major,” noting that enrollments in surviving English programs are decreasing every year.

Combining the English BA and the Tech Com BS as a new BS program was an alternative to eliminating the English BA. In the new degree, students can still take a variety of courses in literature, composition, linguistics, and technical communication, but the name of the degree on their diplomas will include both “English” and “Technical Communication” as well as “Science” instead of “Art.”